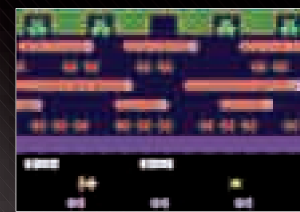
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™



PIRATES!
SID MEIER DISCUSSES THE CREATION OF HIS HIGH SEAS HIT

THE DEFINITIVE...
FROGGER
DISCOVER THE MANY FACES BEHIND GAMING'S MOST VERSATILE AMPHIBIAN



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THE MAKING OF...
GOLDENEYE
WHY RARE'S N64 CLASSIC HAD A LICENCE TO THRILL

BARBARIAN
BEHIND THE SCENES OF PALACE'S BRUTAL BEAT-'EM-UP

WHEN GREY MATTERED

HOW NINTENDO'S 8-BIT CONSOLE HELPED REIGNITE THE INDUSTRY

FEATURED THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

BALLOON FIGHT
AND YOU THOUGHT FLYING OSTRICHES WAS INSANE

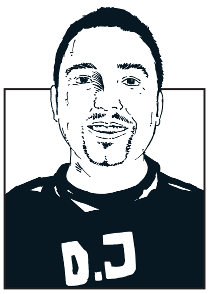
DRAGON'S LAIR
FIND OUT HOW TO SQUEEZE A COIN-OP INTO A HUMBLE 8-BIT COMPUTER

CAPTAIN BLOOD
PERFECT PROOF THAT NO ONE MAKES VIDEOGAMES LIKE THE FRENCH

VIRTUAL REALITY
RETRO GAMER CHARTS THE RISE AND FALL OF A BRAVE NEW WORLD

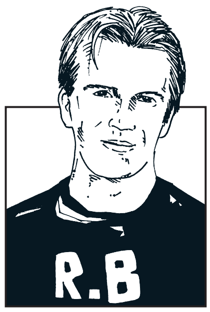
THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE GOLDENEYE MULTIPLAYER CHARACTER



DARRAN JONES

James Bond of course, he's nearly as suave as I am… If not, I used to make sure I got some easy kills with Oddjob. Who says cheaters never prosper?
Expertise: Not taking no for an answer
Currently playing:
UEFA Champions League
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



RICHARD BURTON

I'd go for Oddjob because he was so short the other characters would usually shoot straight over the top of his head. It was considered to be cheating bastness by mates though… Failing that, it was Mr Bond.
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Medal Of Honour: Vanguard
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



MIKE TOOLEY

Unabashedly Trevelyan, to me he was the uber villain of GoldenEye, and when he wasn't being an uber villain he was Sharpe, who was in turn Sean Bean, who was also Trevelyan, its amazing I ever passed this loop and found the game.
Expertise: Having the same live gamer score for 3 months
Currently playing:
UEFA Champions League
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



DAVID CROOKES

I always like to play as Oddjob. He's short; fat… and hard to kill. I'm getting all misty eyed now.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, Dizzy, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Guitar Hero II
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

I've never played GoldenEye. I did play Tomorrow Never Dies on my PlayStation once. It was rubbish. There was no multiplayer mode but if there was I would have chosen Sean Bean.
Expertise: Chainsaw chooglin'
Currently playing:
Super Rub-a-Dub
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DRURY

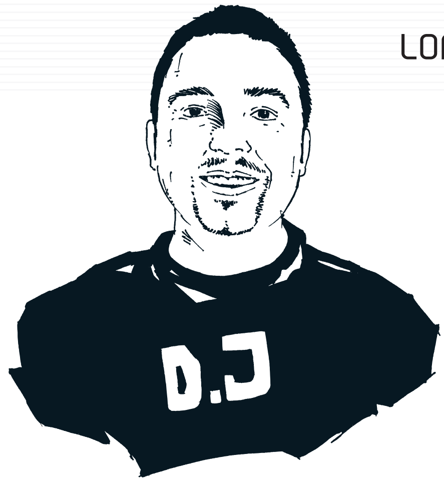
'I think I had a tendency to go for Valentine as Robbie Coltrane's head was especially pointy. Thanks to inside info though, it's Oddjob from now on.'
Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Okami
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

The one that gets shot repeatedly, because he's absolutely no good at First-person shooters. No, look—I'm surrendering! Don't shoot! AIIIEEEE!
Expertise: Games you don't need 37 fingers control
Currently playing:
Archon
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



If there's a continuing complaint we receive that doesn't involve the occasional pornographic ad or the return of the Live Publishing cover disk, it's the constant demand for more home-brew coverage. Well, as of this issue your pleas will have hopefully been answered.

From now on, Retro Gamer will be more interactive than either before. That doesn't mean that each article features a red button that you can press for additional information, but it does mean that we'll be doing whatever we can to ensure that the retro community gets all the coverage it rightly deserves. So from now on you can expect more home-brew news, more reviews of all the latest games and remakes and… well, more of everything really.

Of course, that doesn't mean we've forgotten about the changes we promised for the rest of the magazine, it's just that we want to gradually introduce them, as opposed to scaring you witless with a complete overhaul (something which was never to have been our intent anyway).

So once you've had your fill of all the latest comings and goings of the home-brew scene you can simply kick back and enjoy all the features that continue to make Retro Gamer so special.

Enjoy the magazine





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BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

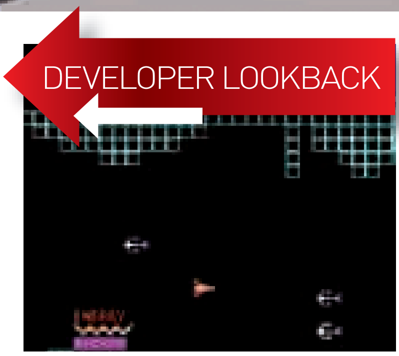


INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…





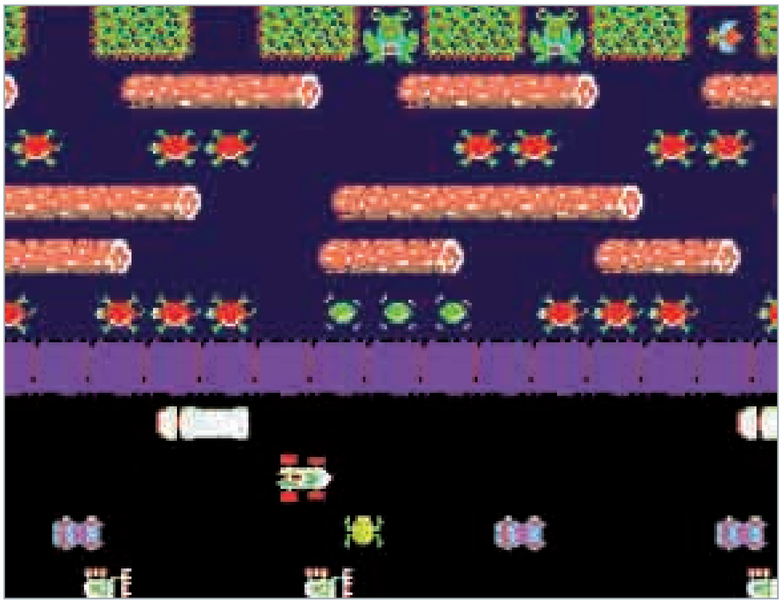


DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

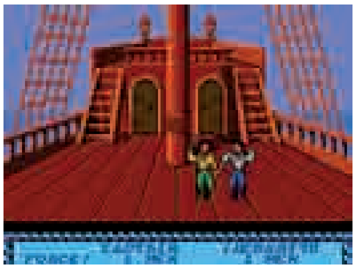


ESSENTIALS

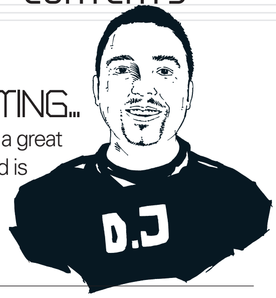
THE DEFINITIVE…



THE MAKING OF…



RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING…

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it





THE BIG ARTICLE…

THE FUTURE IS DEAD



THE MAKING OF…

SUPER FROG



CONVERSION CAPERS

DRAGON'S LAIR

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

OLD GAMES, NEW LOOK

CAPCOM'S STREET FIGHTER AND PUZZLE FIGHTER TO RECEIVE A HIGH-DEFINITION MAKEOVER



Super deformed Capcom characters in lovely hi-def? There is a god and its name is Capcom.

If Ryu and Ken were cows, it's quite possible that they would be the owners of the sorest udders in the whole world, so often has Capcom milked its popular *Street Fighter* franchise.

No doubt buoyed by the massive success of *Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting*, it's now revealed that the new beat-'em-up it will be bringing to Microsoft's downloadable service is (deep breath) *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*.

Also available for Sony's PlayStation 3, Capcom's update will feature redrawn sprites and backgrounds, all 17 characters from the popular arcade game and the ability to play online. While we're greatly pleased that the new sprites are to be redrawn by UDON Comics – the new official comic features some stunning art. We're hoping that this new art won't convince Capcom to change the animation slightly – this could potentially alter the way the game originally played.

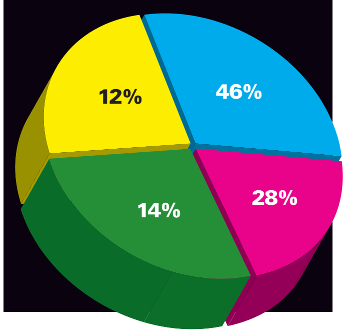
If the news of a new look *Street Fighter* wasn't enough to have us frothing like psychotic cappuccinos, then Capcom's mention of *Puzzle Fighter HD* almost caused us to drop dead with excitement. Little is known about the update, other than that it will feature updated backdrops, online play and several new game modes. Like *Street Fighter*, it will be available for both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 and should be available for download at the end of the year.

HOT TOPICS

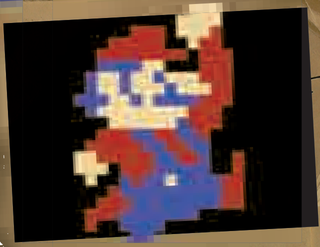
FAVOURITE HORIZONTAL ARCADE SHOOTER

So what's your favourite blaster then?

R-Type **46%**
Gradius **28%**
Salamander **14%**
Darius **0%**
UN Squadron **12%**



HERO OF THE MONTH



MARIO

Every month, Retro Gamer looks at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Mario.

First appearance: *Donkey Kong*

Distinguishing features: Moustache

Weapon of choice: Fireball

Most likely to: Whore himself out to as many genres as possible

Least likely to: Return to plumbing as a full time career

Unusual fact: Mario was actually known as just Jumpman in *Donkey Kong*. He was also played by Bob Hoskins in the *Super Mario Bros* movie.

GOTTA BUY 'EM ALL

NINTENDO'S POKÉMON FRANCHISE IS STILL AS STRONG AS EVER

The recent release of *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pearl* in the States proved that the extremely popular franchise has lost none of its selling power over the last 12 years.

Within just five days, the two new DS titles sold over 1 million units between them, with over half a million people pre-ordering the game before its actual release date. Over 5 million gamers have purchased the game since its Japanese release last September, and it will be interesting to see if the United States manages to achieve similar figures.

Nintendo's popular franchise has now sold over 155 million units to date and has migrated on to a variety of different consoles. Expect this impressive figure to swell even further when both *Diamond* and *Pearl* are released in the UK at the beginning of June.



Nintendo's miniature juggernaut seems unstoppable. Where next for the multi-million pound franchise?

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 20: SPY HUNTER

Spy Hunter was coolness incarnate. The Spectrum version not only played extremely well, but it also boasted one of the most exciting loading screens around. Full of action, it promised slick exciting spills once the game had loaded, and for many Spectrum owners that's exactly what it delivered.



JUST IN JUST AS WE WERE GOING TO PRESS IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT SPEEDBALL 2 WOULD BE HEADING TO XBOX LIVE ARCADE. WE'VE ALREADY STARTED STOCKING UP ON NEW JOYSTICKS…

BACK FROM THE DEAD

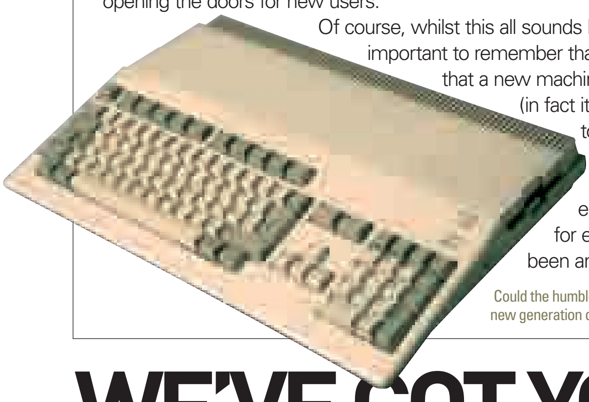
AMIGA INC ANNOUNCES THE RETURN OF EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE 16-BIT COMPUTER

Ever since Amiga Inc purchased the rights to the Amiga line of computers back in 1999, fans have been desperately hoping that a new machine would be on the way.

Well, it would appear that the wait is now over as Amiga Inc has recently announced a partnership with ACK software Controls, and there are plans to release two new machines that will both support the Amiga's OS. The lower-priced machine, currently estimated at $500 will be aimed at consumers, while a more powerful system will be priced at $1,500.

Adam Kowalczyk, head of ACK recently said: "I have been working on these designs with Amiga for almost 12 months and have been able to create two new designs that will fully support the needs and desires of today's Amiga user, while opening the doors for new users."

Of course, whilst this all sounds like brilliant news, it's important to remember that this isn't the first time that a new machine has been announced (in fact it's the 35th) so you'll have to forgive us for being a little cautious about this potentially superb news, especially when no specs for either machine have so far been announced.



Could the humble Amiga be returning to impress a new generation of gamers? Let's hope so.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

SYSTEM 3 REVEALS ITS LATEST EPYX RELEASE

Not content with exciting gamers all over the world about the imminent releases of both *Impossible Mission* and *The Last Ninja*, System 3 has revealed that its latest title to receive a brand new makeover is the rather wonderful *California Games*.





As you can see from this selection of screenshots, System 3 has managed to perfectly capture the spirit of the original events.

Realising that six events won't be deemed as value for money when you can pick up compilations like *Capcom Classics 2* and Sega's *Mega Drive Collection*, System 3 has added both *Summer Games 1* and *2*, meaning that there's a grand total of 22 different events to enjoy. Surfing, half-pipe, frisbee, pole vaulting, diving and the high jump are just a few of the events on offer, and all of them have been given a graphical facelift to ensure that they capture the attention of the more modern gamer.

Of course, System 3 hasn't forgotten all the gamers that played through these great titles the first time around, and like the incoming *Impossible Mission*, the Commodore 64 versions of all three original games will all be included. *Summer Games* is due out towards the end of the summer for the PSP, DS and Nintendo Wii, and with any luck, Retro Gamer will have an exclusive playtest in the very next issue.

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

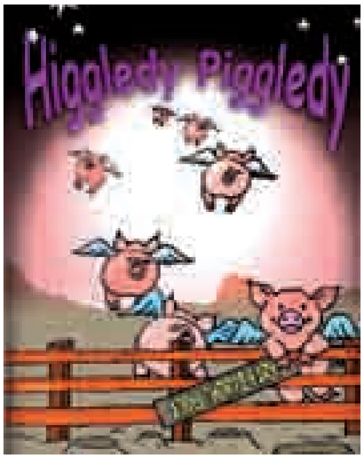
DESIGN A COVER FOR CRONOSOFT'S BRAND NEW SPECTRUM RELEASE

We're getting mighty suspicious of Jonathan Cauldwell. He's seemingly able to turn out superb games in his sleep and their quality is staggering. In fact, his consistency is so good that we're beginning to wonder if he's some kind of Terminator, whose mission is to ensure the existence of the ZX Spectrum by constantly releasing new games for it.



Not content with coding *Blizzard's Rift* (reviewed on page 14) to celebrate the 25th birthday of the Spectrum, he's now teamed up with Cronosoft's Simon Ullyatt and is offering people the chance to draw the cover of his latest release, *Quantum Gardening*, a sequel to *Higgledy Piggledy*.

The competition will stay open until they have enough suitable entries, and the covers will be screened at World of Spectrum, where forum members will vote for their favourite. We've included a screenshot of *Higgledy Piggledy*, which featured the same competition, to give you an idea of the quality you should aim for. Head to http://www.worldofspectrum.org/forums/showthread.php?t=15826



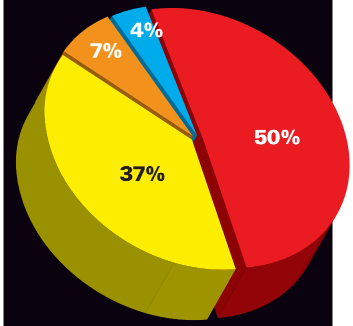
The winning boxart for Higgledy Piggledy, and here's a screenshot for Cauldwell's sequel, Quantum Gardening.

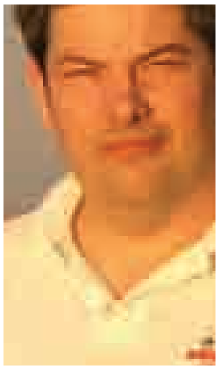
HOT TOPICS

BEST 8-BIT COMPUTER

What happened to all the Amstrad voters?

ZX Spectrum **50%**
Commodore 64 **37%**
Amstrad CPC 464 **7%**
BBC Micro **4%**







» A quiet Oxford Street scene one Sunday morning. Jimmy and some bouncer.

COMMENT

JIMMY TALES #3

Okay, so you're looking at the pics and wondering why there's just one of Jimmy White standing outside a shop with some bouncer, and a nice close-up of a cockroach. Well, bear with me, there's a story to be told and a moral for us all at the end. Date: A Sunday morning in October 1991. Location: Oxford Street, London. Event: Launch of *JW Snooker* at a series of Virgin Megastores to also coincide with the fact that the Virgin games store in Oxford Street is now opening seven days a week. Check out the main pic – it even says 'Sunday' on the left. Sunday opening was unusual back then, where as now everything is open seven days a week.

The day kicks off at 11am at the first of three venues – the new Virgin Marble Arch store. The whole basement of the shop was kitted out with *JWWS* gear. Monitors with game show reels running, a selection of computers in demo mode, handouts and other freebies piled up all over the shop, journalists clutching cameras, a bunch of Jimmy hangers-on, and half a dozen organisers, but . . . not a single real punter came into the shop. Dead as a doornail. I don't think anyone came in for the first 20 minutes and it was extremely embarrassing for everyone concerned. I was wondering if someone had got the address wrong, or the date wrong, and a dozen other possibilities. Anyhow, one hour later, we had to scoot as the next appointment was round the corner at the new Oxford Street Virgin games store.

So we all pile into the PR guy's fat BMW, and drive about 500 yards round the corner. What greeted us was an amazing sight. Because there waiting for us was a HUGE cue of people milling around the entrance, young and old, men, women, and some interestingly dressed ladies not normally seen in the day-time.

As a bit of a teaser, the PR guy lowered the passenger window and got Jimmy to wave as we slowly drove right by. This caused uproar and whistling and some people ran towards the car, so we sped off to go round the back and find a more discreet entrance. I've only ever seen crowds like this on pop vids!

Anyway, we sneak in round the back, and the PR guy goes into the front of the shop to find the staff standing in the window with the door locked, not sure what to do with the crowd out the front banging on the window.

Eventually the doors open, and in stream hundreds of Jimmy fans, all making a b-line for the man himself, perched on a bar stool behind the counter, black marker pen at the ready, waiting to sign countless signatures. There was quite a lot of people snapping pics and flashes going off all over the place, and it was proving to be totally the opposite to the first dead place.

Most of the people were probably 15 to 25-years-old, but there were a few exceptions. One elderly bloke I spoke to said he had seen his grandson playing *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* on a small TV and thought it was a TV broadcast, as he had no concept of 3D games. One week later he had learnt enough about Amigas to load and run the game and hold the mouse thing the right way up. He apparently had become hooked on the idea of actually being able to interact with a 3D game instead of just watching it. Anyway, the highlight of this part of the day was when these two snooker groupies stepped up. One looked like she was smuggling peanuts under her T-shirt, and asked if Jimmy could leave his mark right across her very obvious curves. I am not kidding. Unfortunately this was before phone cams were invented so I don't have the proof, but nonetheless Jimmy duly helped the young lady out and deftly left a JW smiley, after a couple of practise attempts nearby.

After an hour or so, we were told to wrap it up, as a lunch was being held in a restaurant

"ALL OF SUDDEN ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE. SUDDENLY JIMMY JUMPS TO HIS FEET AND IS WHACKING THE HELL OUT OF THE TABLE WITH THE MICROPHONE…" ARCHER MACLEAN

round the corner. We did a quick photo shoot out the front of the shop (see pic!) and then all piled back into the fat BMW.

After general agreement that the last appearance had gone well, we pulled up outside this posh place round the back of Oxford Street, and about six of us fell out the BMW. We're greeted by two people from Capital Radio who've been waiting to do an interview with Jimmy whilst we have lunch. Because Virgin Games and Jimmy's agency could only get him to do a full day's PR, he was fully booked time-wise, hence the interview packed into the lunch hour. So we all march into the restaurant, Jimmy gets recognised as usual, but we are guided into a private room by the head waiter, and sit down for a few drinks. But no one could have forecast what was about to happen. . .

You see, we sat there, for what seemed like 45 minutes and still no food had arrived. Jimmy is beginning to complain because it's a Sunday, and his wife's delayed the Sunday roast till the evening, just so he can give us a full day. So, he demands the waiter bring in some rolls or something. Sure enough, in comes a basket of crusty rolls, delivered by a man making lots of apologetic noises.

Meanwhile the journalist and sound guy are ready to get on with the recording, so out comes a big flash microphone for Jimmy to hold, and a list of questions. The first couple went fine, but all of sudden all hell breaks loose. Suddenly Jimmy jumps to his feet and is whacking the hell out of the table with the microphone, and the sound engineers's face is screwed up with the pain of it all thumping through his headphones.

To everyone's amazement a sodding great cockroach had leapt out the bread basket. Jimmy's laying into it with the mic and bits are breaking off, but each time he lands a thump the damn thing flips up and runs off. It must have been one of those indestructible roaches from the tropics, because each time he flattened it, the little bastard refused to die, even if it had lost a couple of legs.

In walks the head waiter to see what all the noise is about, just as Jimmy is marching out having tossed the microphone up in the air. The waiter begs us to stay and that everything will be on the house, but it's too late – JW's having none of it.

I didn't know whether to laugh, cry, or light up. It was just so surreal. Everything had been going so well, PR success was assured, dollar signs were reeling through our eyes.

I raced out into the street and caught up with him. We all tried to laugh it off, and persuaded him to try a Chinese because at least there's no rolls and they fry everything.

We did eventually finish the day with the third PR stint at the Tottenham Court Road store, albeit two hours late, which passed without any hiccups, and the game went on to be a number one bestseller etc etc.

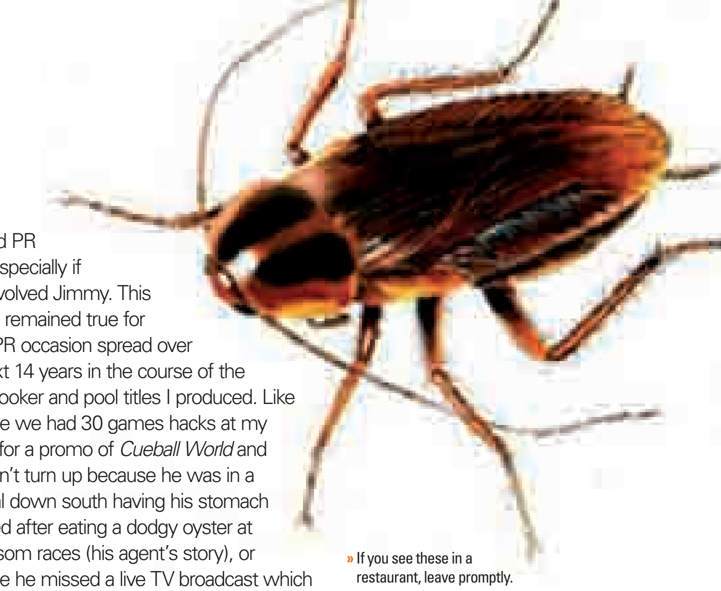
Over the months of PR that followed that initial day, I learnt that nothing's guaranteed with planned PR days, especially if they involved Jimmy. This pattern remained true for every PR occasion spread over the next 14 years in the course of the four snooker and pool titles I produced. Like the time we had 30 games hacks at my house for a promo of *Cueball World* and JW didn't turn up because he was in a hospital down south having his stomach pumped after eating a dodgy oyster at the Epsom races (his agent's story), or the time he missed a live TV broadcast which still went ahead with a stand-in Jimmy who didn't quite look the part, or the time his car turned over on the M6, and plenty more.

Whatever the event it always had some major change of direction but was always a laugh. But I'll save the best story until another time – this was to do with ITV's live Saturday morning 'MotorMouth' show in November 1991, which also gave rise the Studio name Awesome Developments which produced *Cueball 2*, and *Cueball World* 10 years later.

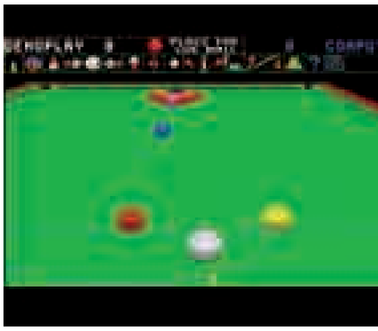
Anyway, the moral of this tale is: If you don't like seeing roaches in restaurants, then stay at home for your Sunday joint.

Next month: Jimmy tales #2, or is that #4. Sheesh.

ARCH



» If you see these in a restaurant, leave promptly.



» *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* in all its polygon glory.

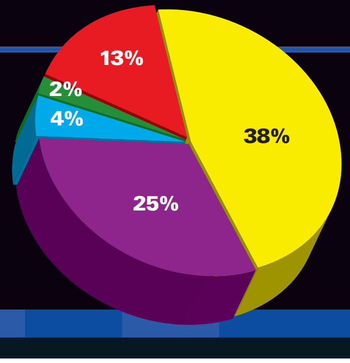
» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

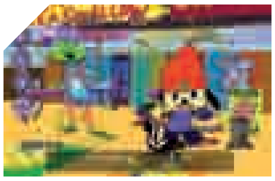
HOT TOPICS

BEST NINTENDO FRANCHISE

Mario **38%**
Zelda **25%**
Donkey Kong **4%**
F-Zero **2%**
Pilotwings **0%**
Metroid **13%**



PARAPPA ON PSP!



» Sony shows you how to cram a rapping puppy into a portable console.

PARAPPA THE RAPPER HEADS TO SONY'S PSP

PUPPY POWER

Ten years ago, a rather strange rapping puppy burst onto Sony's PlayStation, and now, a decade later, the lovable mutt's about to do exactly the same thing on the PSP.

Deemed by many as essentially kick-starting the rhythm-action genre, this new PSP version will feature all the songs from the original game, with the added option of downloading a further eight via the PSP's Infrastructure Mode. Up to four players will be able to compete in head-to-head battles at any one time, and Sony's senior marketing manager, John Koller is confident that Parappa's new outing is going to introduce him to a whole new generation of fans. Expect to see a review in our next PSP round-up.

CLASSIC ADVERTS TO STIMULATE THE NOSTALGIA GLAND

THE GALLERY



» Exterminator US 1989



» Ghosts 'N Goblins US 1985



» Green Beret UK 1986



» Pyjamarama UK 1984

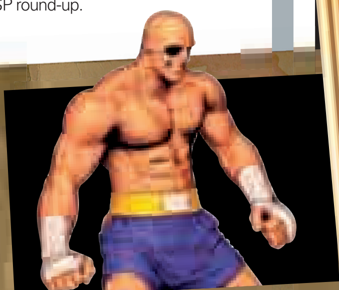


» Renegade UK 1987



» Mermaid Madness UK 1986

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



SAGAT

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would Batman be without the Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Rubbish, that's what. This month: Sagat.

First Appearance: *Street Fighter*

Distinguishing Features: Eye patch, scar on chest

Weapon of Choice: Tiger Uppercut

Most likely to: Team up with M.Bison

Least likely to: Take Ryu down the pub

Unusual fact: Sagat's scar was given to him by Ryu at the end of the first *Street Fighter* tournament. They've been sworn enemies ever since.

COMPETITION? WHAT COMPETITION

GAME BUYS GAMESTATION FOR £74 MILLION

A buyout has been on the cards for GameStation for over a year now, but we never expected it to be by rival Game. Nevertheless, this is what happened when Game announced that it had bought the rival videogame retailer off Blockbuster for a cool £74 million.

At this moment in time, it's unclear whether GameStation stores will become Games, or if they will retain their own separate identity, but with Game stating that it's fully aware what sort of customers visit each store, we're hoping that not too many physical changes are made. After all, GameStation is one of the few retailers that sell classic retro gear in all of its stores, and it will be a pity if you'll no longer be able to walk into a GameStation/Game in 12 months time and not be able to pick up that Mega Drive cartridge you were so desperately searching for.



» Let's hope the disappearance of GameStation doesn't spell the end for retro bargains in the high street.

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JUNE 07

THE SETTLERS 2: THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY

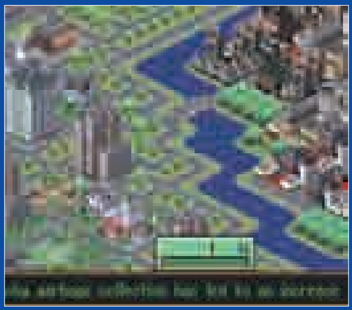
Released: 01 June

Publisher: Ubisoft

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Finally publishers are cottoning on to the fact that the DS's stylus makes it ideal for playing strategy games. *Settlers 2* was easily one of the highlights of the franchise, and it will be interesting to see how it compares to the likes of *Sim City DS* and *Theme Park DS*. Don't get too excited by the detailed screenshot, though. It's from the PC version.



JUNE 07

SIM CITY DS

Released: 22 June

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Yes another classic strategy title turns up on Nintendo's dinky handheld. After impressing us with the wonderfully cute *Theme Park DS*, EA's next offering is city building sim *Sim City*. While the stylus controls are bound to ensure that *Sim City* plays like a proverbial dream, we're more interested in being able to use the microphone to put out raging infernos. Has the potential to be massive.



JUNE 07

EARTHWORM JIM

Released: 29 June

Publisher: Atari

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Whilst we've not managed to play Earthworm Jim's latest adventure, early screens and videos suggest that it could be a decent return to form. While the visuals have been updated, they do mimic the style of the original and seem to have captured its wacky sense of humour. There's also a two-player mode, although we're unsure at this time if it's co-operative or not.



JUNE 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

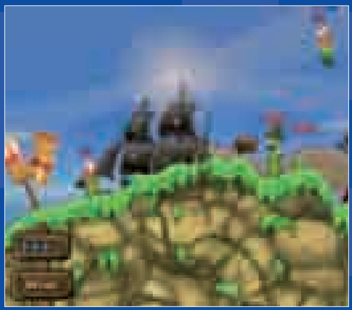
Released: 29 June

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

As great as the original Neo Geo Pocket version was, we're expecting the DS outing to be even better – mainly because it will be controlled via the stylus. Reports are suggesting that this version is trickier than the original, but we're confident SNK Playmore has been able to retain everything that made the Neo Geo Pocket version so much fun.



JULY 07

WORMS: OPEN WARFARE 2

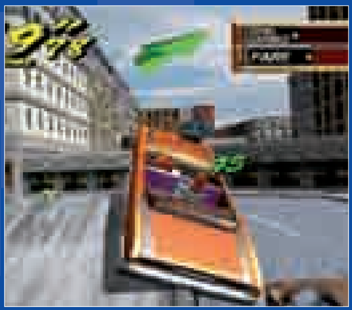
Released: July

Publisher: THQ

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, DS

While *Worms Open Warfare* was superb fun on the PSP, it was somewhat lacking on the DS. This time, though, that's all set to change, as an early play suggests that the DS sequel is set to fix all the little flaws that were present in the first game. Set over a variety of different time periods and with some superb visuals (particularly on the PSP version) *Open Warfare 2* promises to be very special.



JULY 07

CRAZY TAXI: FARE WARS

Released: July

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Crazy Taxi was one of our favourite Dreamcast games, so it's great to see that it's being shrunken down to fit onto Sony's PSP. Featuring elements from both *Crazy Taxi* and its Dreamcast only sequel, *Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars* will be the first game in the franchise's history to offer a multiplayer mode and is bound to be a huge hit with fans of the original. Will *The Offspring* decide to return, though?



AUGUST 07

ALIEN SYNDROME

Released: 31 August

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, Wii

It may be one of Sega's more obscure coin-ops, but we're actually really looking forward to *Alien Syndrome*. While the original was basically a sci-fi take on *Gauntlet*, the PS2 update that was released under the Sega Ages banner was a rip-roaring blaster that we still occasionally return to. Early reports suggest that this new update will feature a similar blend of aliens, gunplay and slime. We can't wait.



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

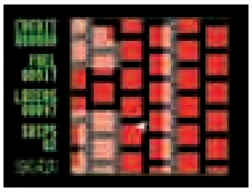
One of our most anticipated DS titles has slipped to December '07. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus, this could well be the most distinctive *Zelda* yet.

A GAME WITH BOUNTY HUNTERS AND SPACE EXPLORATION? SOUNDS AWESOME. PLUS IT'S GOT ALIEN TOMBS? WE'RE IN HEAVEN!

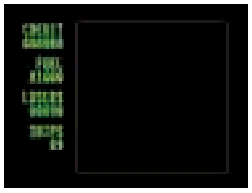
BLIZZARD'S RIFT

YOU'LL START A FEW ARGUMENTS AFTER THIS

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM
» **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
» **WRITTEN BY:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL
» **LINK:** HTTP://TINYURL.COM/2TFCTL
» **PRICE:** FREE
» **REVIEWED BY:** DAVID CROOKES



» Keeping your craft away from the walls is a very tricky task.



» Star trekking across the universe as you hunt for a planet.

They say *Grand Theft Auto* turns people into thugs. What rubbish. It's games like *Blizzard's Rift* which do that. Every now and then a game comes along that is so simple, so frustrating that you literally beat yourself up when you fail. If you're not throwing things around the room and thumping your fist into the table when you play this game, then you're an utter pacifist. Stalwart retro programmer Jonathan Cauldwell has created a game which apes the *Thrust*-style of shooters. Yet, with a bit of subtlety, he sets it apart from most similar titles by lending it a modicum of depth.

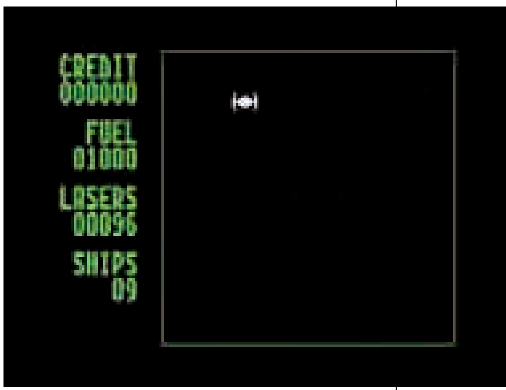
It helps that the game has a solid plot, with Cauldwell using his imagination well in setting up a back story which actually engages rather than bores the player. It tells of bounty hunter Digby Blizzard coming across the wreckage of a craft once owned by space adventurer Henri Latrine. Although it had crashed centuries earlier, it still contains a functioning black box flight recorder which reveals every system and every planet Latrine had visited. The exciting thing is that Latrine had apparently discovered a large number of alien tombs, although no space scavenger since has managed to find them. With the information to hand, Blizzard sets about trying to bag the tomb's treasures all for himself.

Before you get down to business, you need to select a star system and a planet. The game then sends you on a short journey through space during which – thankfully - you can't get killed. Your fuel levels are also unaffected by the trip but you can fire at any scavengers you encounter and earn some brownie points.

The main game, however, begins when you reach a planet and start to explore the alien tombs. The aim is to collect as many diamonds as you can, find the teleporter and leave. But navigating the tombs in your triangle-shaped ship is hard work. Controlling your ship requires excellent technique, because you must constantly thrust to counteract the effects of gravity while spinning your craft in the right direction.

This balancing act makes completing each mission very satisfying, particularly so since you also need to avoid gunfire which hurts just as much as when you collide with an object other than a gem. It would have been nice to be given a protective shield at times but, alas, you are left to fend for yourself and this cranks up the difficulty level even further.

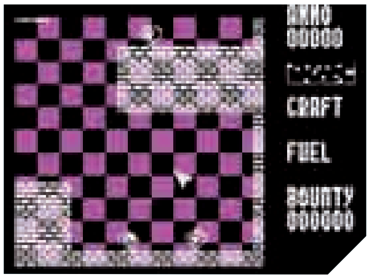
A nice touch is that you can revisit tombs, but by then other scavengers may have taken your treasure. You also need to watch out for fuel depletion. By pausing the game and firing, you can use any points you have built up to buy lasers, fuel, ships and boosters, adding a much greater depth to the game.

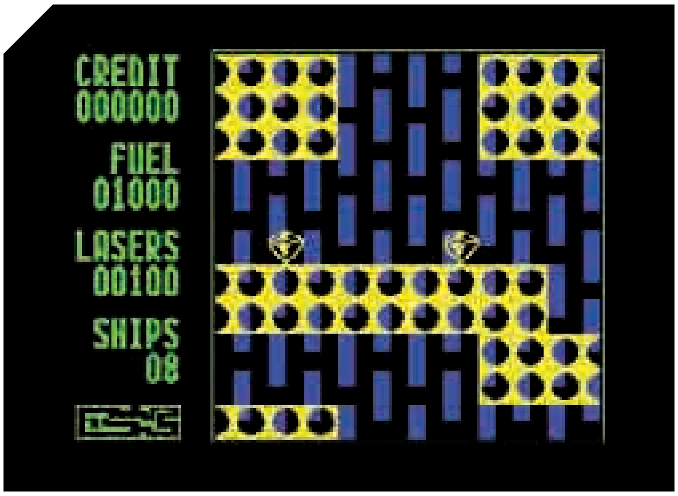


» Shoot at any rival scavengers and gain some extra points.

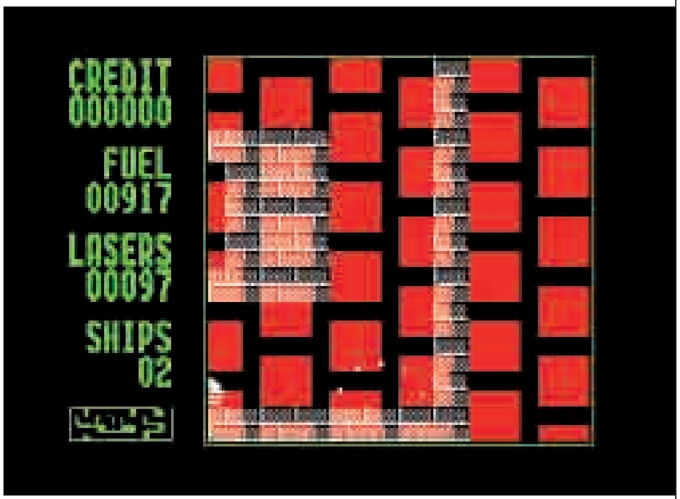
Best of all, though, the game is free (which means you can forgive the near-lack of sound). Jonathan has released this 128K-only game to celebrate the Spectrum's 25th anniversary and he has placed the title on his website. What it shows is that the Speccy is far from stale and lifeless – and it's fitting that gems like this are being created more than two decades on.

RATING **79%**





» Take it easy and these gems will be yours.



» Boom: You're dead... again!

A GAME CREATED IN ONLY FIVE HOURS? HOW GOOD CAN IT REALLY BE? AND PREPARE FOR SOME BUBBLE-STYLE FUN…

QUESTY

FANCY ANOTHER CUTESY PLATFORMER?

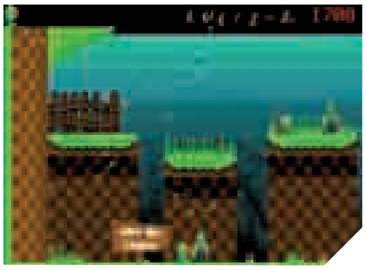
- » **FORMAT:** PC
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **PRODUCED BY:** TREVOR STOREY (SMILA)
- » **LINK:** WWW.RETROREMAKES.COM
- » **PRICE:** FREE
- » **REVIEWED BY:** DAVID CROOKES



Nostalgia can be a dangerous thing. As well as giving us rose-tinted specs, we also start to seize upon anything which resembles the past.

Questy is one of those retro-style games, a title which aims to recreate the feel of platform games of days gone by. But considering it took Trevor only five hours to make, it's pretty damn good, a solid accomplishment which has the bonus of Commodore 64 music playing in the background.

It's obvious that Trevor is a retro nut. To make this game, he took the engine of previous effort, *Geordie's Ale Adventure*, and re-skinned it, creating new graphics and levels.

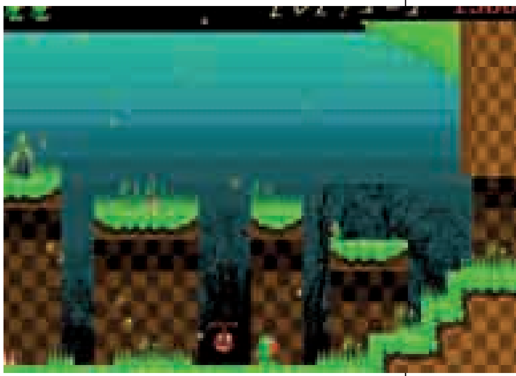


» So many bugs to shoot, so little time to do it. It's time to call in the exterminators.

He has also kept his control system deliberately simple – just left, right and jump, and the graphics, while not amazing, are cute and bounce along well.

In the first level, you have to save some little kiddies, bumping into them to score points while avoiding all of the nasties. The theme throughout is pretty much the same and you'll be leaping onto platforms, collecting items and getting out of the way of the enemy in no time at all. But while it starts off reasonably easy, it gets much more difficult (especially when your foes are hidden behind fences). The quality of home-brew games never ceases to amaze us here at Retro Gamer and this is up there with the best.

RATING: 83%

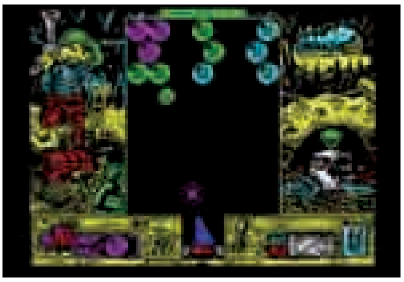


» If you're a fan of shoot-'em-ups, what are you doing reading this? Download it now!

CANNON BUBBLE

WE'RE FOREVER FIRING BUBBLES

- » **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **WRITTEN BY:** UTOPIAN/CEZ GAME STUDIOS
- » **LINK:** HTTP://CEZGS.COMPUTEREMUZONE.COM/ENG/
- » **PRICE:** FREE
- » **REVIEWED BY:** DAVID CROOKES



» Hmm, could there be a pirate theme here?…

In an industry obsessed by the new, it's wonderful to see old favourites dusted off and recreated with care on retro machines. *Cannon Bubble* is one such delight, taking the *Bust-A-Move* style of gaming and incorporating a pirate theme. Although games such as these are relatively simple and don't require fancy visuals, this release has been attentively put together, each screen showing the utmost of care.

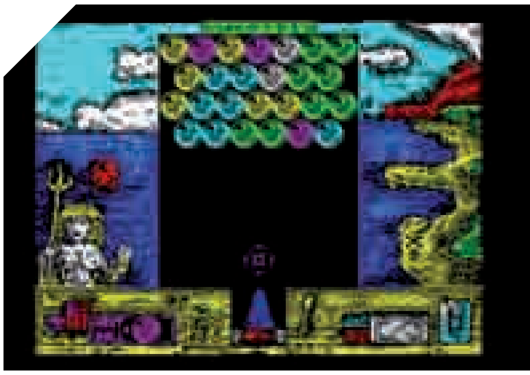
Visuals aside, however, and the same addictive bubble popping premise which has held this genre together for getting on two decades remains. Aside from the jaunty pirate tune playing in the background, you just get on with the task in hand – using the rotating cannon to shoot coloured bubbles into the air. You're supposed to attach the bubbles to those of the same colour and once you get three together, they disappear. If there are any other connected bubbles, they drop too – which brings in an element of strategy – and once you clear a screen, you progress.

As well as a single mode where each stage becomes progressively more difficult (but not excessively so, sadly), *Cannon Bubble* can be played with two people and that's when the fun really starts. Having a friend along for the ride engages both players in a head-to-head challenge. Any hanging balls are added to your opponent's screen and, as with single player, there are special balls which can explode or eliminate one particular colour which adds to the fun.

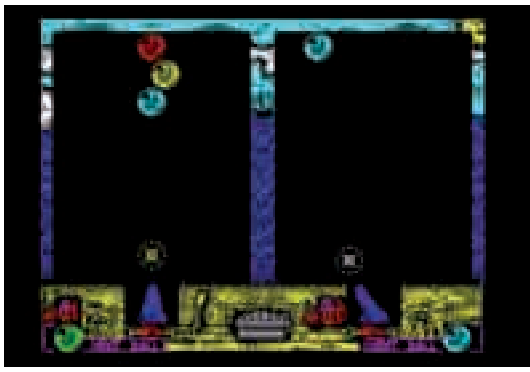
By keeping an eye on the next ball – handily shown in a box beneath your cannon – you can plan ahead and ensure you progress through the 30 levels needed to win the game. The physics are good too, letting you bounce the balls on the sides of the wall in the manner you would expect.

If there is any criticism, though, it would be that the game adds nothing new. Such titles are increasingly ten-a-penny (although this one is free). And while the game is enjoyable to start with, it can become boring, particularly if you play alone. Another gripe is that, all too often, the game throws out three balls of the same colour one after another and this lessens the challenge – it doesn't seem as random as you would perhaps like it to be. Get a mate involved though and you'll while away a wet afternoon easily enough.

RATING 60%



» The next three are all purple? That makes things a lot easier!



» Two-player mode is so much fun.

WE REVIEW A GAME THAT WOULDN'T LOOK OUT OF PLACE IN NOTRE DAME AND ANOTHER SPIN ON THE CENTIPEDE CLASSIC

Remake of the Mouth

HUNCHBACK

THOSE BELLS ARE RINGING AGAIN



- **FORMAT:** PC
- **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- **WRITTEN BY:** MICK FARROW
- **LINK:** HTTP://TINYURL.COM/2EY3NY
- **PRICE:** FREE
- **REVIEWED BY:** DAVID CROOKES

Released in 1983, *Hunchback* was one of the first games many people played. It was much-loved for its obstacle-ridden platforms which had players dodging arrows and fireballs, and swinging across ropes – often combined in quick succession.

Remade by Mick Farrow, this 15-screen game loses little of its charm while updating the graphics to a high cartoon-style standard. The main character is taken straight from the Ocean box art and it is neatly animated. The facial expressions in particular are a hoot and certainly had us chuckling away.

Gameplay is faithful and it is all about timing, jumping at just the right moment, grabbing a rope with a milisecond to spare. Providing extra tension, if any was needed, is a soldier, who quickly climbs a ladder on each screen in the hope of capturing our hero.

The game also has great sound effects (although at first we thought there was a dog barking and then realised it was the swoosh of the rope) and a neat map in the style of the original game shows your progress in the corner of the screen.

Some bugs mar the experience, however. The words 'Game Over' not only flash for far too long but, in one instance, actually stayed on the screen when the game restarted… not the most handy thing you'd want in a game. There were some error messages too and it actually crashed the computer twice.

Regardless of that, you'll still enjoy it. Let's just call that a hunch.

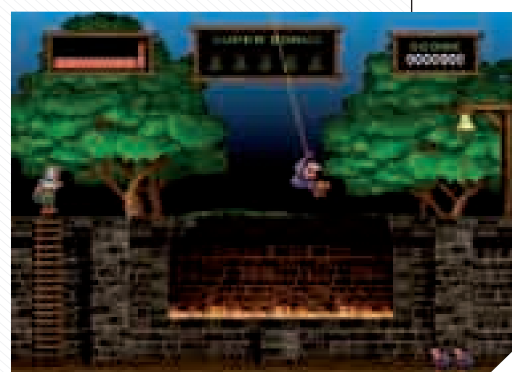
RATING **65%**



» Hardcore Amiga fans will notice that the trees have been taken from *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*.



» To be honest, if a fireball was heading towards us, we wouldn't be smiling.



» Wheeee! Get over that pit – the hardest part is jumping off the rope at the end.

MILLENIPEDE

- UURGH, CREEPY CRAWLIES

- **FORMAT:** PC
- **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- **WRITTEN BY:** FIRESTORM PRODUCTIONS
- **LINK:** HTTP://TYPHOON.KUTO.DE/
- **REVIEWED BY:** DAVID CROOKES
- **PRICE:** FREE

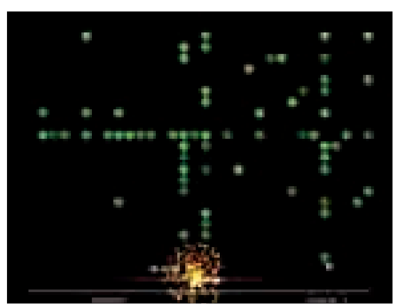


» A field of magic mushrooms.

One of the Atari 2600's all-time classic games was *Centipede*. And ever since, there have been numerous clones, the latest being *Millenipede*, put together in just one week by Prospero of Firestorm Productions. Despite bearing similarity in name to 1982's largely unsuccessful sequel, *Millipede*, this new game is purely based on the original – so much so that it no one could ever think to dub it groundbreaking, unless you led a sheltered life that is.

Even the programmer himself (you may, or may not, be interested to know the Atari original was programmed by a woman, Dona Bailey) admits this. There is very little in the way of innovation, taking the classic title and merely replicating it with more stunning graphics, although these, unlike other three-dimensional updates of this game, are in 2D and remain spartan.

Although the explosions when the centipede hits the player are a lovely sight, avoiding death is of more concern. The action is fast and can be controlled by either the mouse or keyboard, both being as good at getting out of the way of spiders or snails as they are at firing towards the centipedes.



» Hey, fireworks… isn't it pretty!



» Look, an ickle centipede.

Each dead centipede magically regenerates into a mushroom but there can be so many on screen that you can't see the insects for the fungi. So you'll also need to blast them out of the way. The mushrooms require four hits before they eventually disappear but it's necessary because you'll never be able to deal with wave-upon-wave of centipedes if you don't.

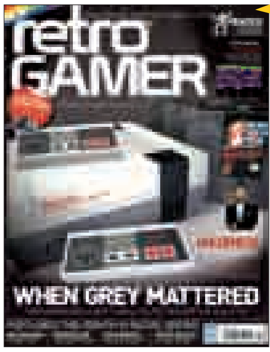
If *Millenipede* was an exercise in displaying how the latest technology can boost an old game, then it would fail. But seeing as it was developed in less than seven days for an event called the 94th Wednesday Workshop, it can be forgiven, especially as Prospero says he is not about the abandon the project and is currently working on joystick control and more video modes.

Just don't expect anything you haven't already seen before.

RATING **50%**

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

SHORT BUT SWEET

Dear Retro Gamer,

I know you are all busy so I will keep this short and sweet.

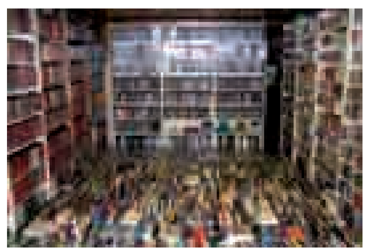
I think it would be a really great idea if you could ask all of your readers to create short videos of their computer game collections or anything retro related and post them on YouTube. They could then email you with the link, which can then be featured in your magazine.

To get the ball rolling I have done just that by filming and editing my own video about my own private arcade game collection. This has been posted on YouTube and can be found at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCIYPwZ31ZI

I would be very grateful for any feedback on this idea and the video that is linked above.

Kind Regards, Alan Jacobs, Rainham, Essex.

That's an absolutely brilliant idea, Richard, and something that the entire retro community will be able to enjoy. In fact, it's so good, we're surprised that we didn't think of it first. Who knows, we may even start giving away prizes for the best collections that get sent in to us… In the meantime you have earned yourself a Blankety Blank *cheque book and pen… darn, we're all out. Can you make do with a Retro Gamer binder and T-shirt instead?*



» Our collection is nowhere near as impressive as this.

there's no way we can fit all those in the magazine… Still, there's no reason why you can't have your feature and we'll even tell you the following joke. How do you get 50 Pikachus onto a bus? Poke 'em on. Thank you, we're here all month.

A MINI ADVENTURE

Dear Retro Gamer-Team

Summer is coming and so is mobile gaming. When looking at the actual generation – especially the Nintendo DS and how its innovative features are praised – and your hardware section – especially the fact that something is missing – I do get a little sentimental. Back in 2001 Nintendo did a great job with the Pokémon Mini – yes a strange but also a great little device. The black-and-not-so-black display isn't great but the rest is: game pad, shoulder button, infrared port, vibrator and most of all the shock detector – shake the little bastard to hit your opponent in a boxing mini-game.

Please add the Pokémon Mini to your hardware section and probably even honour it with a special to show the world that the DS is "just" a cross between Nintendo's own ideas and the Tiger.com. But be careful; don't swallow it!

Yours hopefully, Klemens

You're right Klemens, the Pokémon Mini is certainly a nice little device, but we won't be including it in the hardware section as it's little more than an evolution of those LCD handhelds we all used to play, and



» The Pokémon Mini in all its tiny glory.



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a Sega Mega Drive Plug 'N Play pack. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

WILL SOMEBODY THINK OF THE CHILDREN?

Dear Retro Gamer,

Computer games are mostly enjoyed by the younger ones in our society; many of which are minors.

Now I am no prude and am partial to the joys of pornography, however I think it is totally irresponsible for a magazine such as yours with a large minor readership to allow classified adverts such as those in this month's retro magazine, eg 'Girls who love it from behind', 'Help me get my knickers off live', 'Pink Pussy club call for satisfaction' to appear in it.

Unless you promise to leave this kind of advert to other adult publications I certainly will not be buying your magazine ever again and I will recommend to others to do exactly the same.

Surely you can see the damage such a policy will do to your circulation? You don't need it, as there are plenty of other suitable advertisers that can contribute more to the profit of your magazine.

Ian Waddell

Whilst we can appreciate your views about the pornography adverts that appeared in Issue 36, we can't really agree with your assessment that Retro Gamer has a large minor readership base.

Granted, we're aware that young children do read the magazine, but the main bulk of the magazine's readership tends to be made up of gamers over the age of 25 – hardly minors by any means. Still, we will do what we can to ensure that future content is definitely toned down.

COMING OF AGE

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to drop you a mail and complement you on your excellent last issue (36). Whilst every article was as brilliantly written as usual, special mention has to go to the brilliant *Banjo-Kazooie* article and the wonderful feature about *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. While both games are a little too modern for my taste, there can be no denying that they are prime examples of their genres and proves just

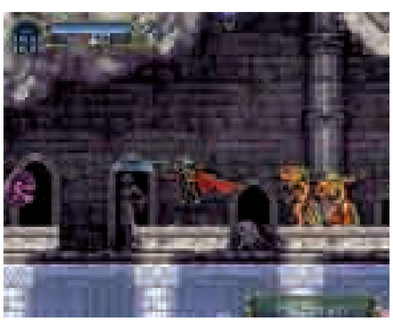


how influential Retro Gamer is becoming. Getting the guys at Rare in particular to talk is no mean feat and I really think the gap is widening between Retro Gamer and other feature-based game mags. Here's hoping that future issues are every bit as good.
Yours faithfully, William Gale

Thanks for the kind words William, it's really appreciated. It's certainly been a long hard slog but we're slowly filling Retro Gamer with more and more great content. This issue alone there's GoldenEye, Super Frog, Pirates! *and* Barbarian *– not too shabby we're sure you'll agree. Oh, and if you liked the* Banjo-Kazooie *feature, wait until you see what else we've been talking to Rare about…*



» Getting an interview about *Banjo-Kazooie* was a rare opportunity. Pun definitely intended.



» William Gale was very pleased with the *Castlevania* coverage, as were a great many other readers who took the time to write in.

AUCTION WOES

I'm in need of a little advice. I have a few prototype Jaguar, Game Boy, SNES and Mega Drive cartridges that I want to sell and need your help. The last time I tried to do this on eBay my listing was removed (the reason being is that they consider anything other than official releases to be pirated). However, I was swamped with email bids straight away – with the winning email bidder being a Frank Cifaldi from Las Vegas (who you mentioned in your excellent Gaming Illuminati article). Some of the email

FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES IN THE MAG. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE LICENCE?

ID: Dudley
I'm fond of my driving licence. It lets me drive.

ID: pforson
I always liked the game *Hong Kong Phooey* on my Spectrum. Great cartoon, average game, but I loved it nonetheless.

ID: Woody
For me, it has to be *GoldenEye* on the N64.

ID: Opa-Opa
Ocean's *Robocop* was probably one of the best use's of a licence, and one of the very few film tie-ins that were/are any good.

ID: Antiriad2097
The Untouchables. It's all in the name.

ID: SirClive
Ocean's *Batman* licence. Using it for John Ritman's cutesy isometric platformer so great at a time when we were starting to see Batman as a very dark character. They came up with superbly comic characters that made the game feel like the old TV show.

ID: monkey puzzle
Michael Jackson's Moonwalker was a fantastic game on the Mega Drive and arcade. Bloody awful film, though.

ID: DrBlue
I love *Dune II*. There's a film and a book licence for you.

ID: daverage
I really liked castle of illusion.

ID: Mayhem
GoldenEye all the way. It set the standard for what a company could do with a film-based licence, instead of the usual boring platform malarkey, and turned it into one of the greatest games of all time.

ID: NorthWay
The Hobbit. Melbourne House did a fine job of drumming up the hype and producing a respectable game.

ID: EvilArmourKing
Robocop. Could easily have been a standard shooter, but they incorporated several key scenes from the film to make it the best use of a licence of all time!

ID: Mic82
Die Hard trilogy on PSone.

ID: revgiblet
Yeah, there's been an awful lot of tat attached to it but SSI's Gold Box games, *Eye Of The Beholder*, *Shadow Over Mystara* and *Baldur's Gate* show that the *D&D* licence is always going to produce some real quality.

ID: SirClive
Zool – who'd have thought that we would have a game sponsored by a lolly, that didn't suck!

ID: ID: Mr. Pointless
GoldenEye multiplayer was classic – nothing like running out of ammo, frantically tossing proxy mines in a panic then seeing your opponent become engulfed in the resulting explosions, killing him hilariously. And I survived them.

ID: The Master
Has anyone said *Cool Spot* yet? I thought that was crap, I just want to get my name in the magazine again.

THE RETRO FORUM



» Stephen White wants more PlayStation coverage, but does everybody else? Head on over to the forum to have your say.

bidders were quite ferocious in their bidding and attitude… and sent mails like YOU HAVE TO SELL ME THESE GAMES!!! I AM THE NO.1 NES COLLECTOR IN THE WORLD and so on.

Any clue as to how I can auction them? Shall I risk eBay again?
Cheers, Dave

Sounds like your videogames certainly stirred up a lot of interest Dave, and while eBay would obviously be the perfect place to sell all of your items, you risk the same thing happening again. Your best bet, probably, is to head on over to a website like The Assembler http://www.assemblergames.com/forums/ and see if you have any luck there. Otherwise we will trade them with you for a year's magazine subscription?



» If you've got a NES prototype like this lying around you could be sitting on a fortune.

Dear Retro Gamer,
I'm just writing in to say how much I love your magazine and that it's now the only videogame publication that I bother reading. Whilst there's the occasional odd mistake, I don't think I've ever read a magazine that's so passionate about videogames, and some of the features you've covered recently have been incredibly good. I've just finished reading Issue 35 and felt that the *Contra*, *Smash TV* and *King Of Fighters* articles were fantastic stuff.

Being a younger retro gamer (I'll be 25 this year) I've no interest at all in the early 8-bit computers, but can appreciate their need to be in the magazine. However, when you're covering games like *WipEout* and *Donkey Kong Country* I feel like I'm returning to my childhood. Please make sure that you carry on with this newer coverage; we're not all into the 8-bit period.

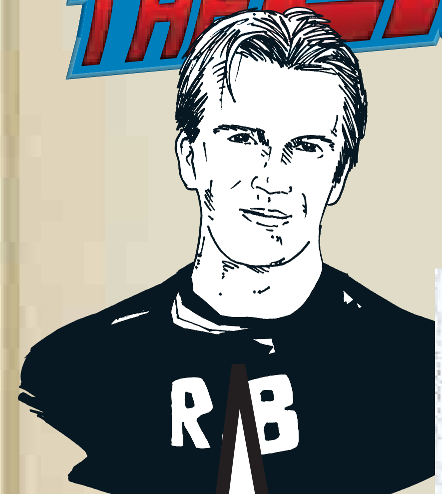
Stephen White, via email

Glad to hear that you're enjoying the magazine, Stephen. As for your preference of newer material, we will do what we can to accommodate you in the magazine, but as you have rightly pointed out, there are just as many people out there who still really love the 8-bit period of gaming. Ultimately, Retro Gamer will do its very best to try and cater to everybody, whether they believe retro gaming started 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

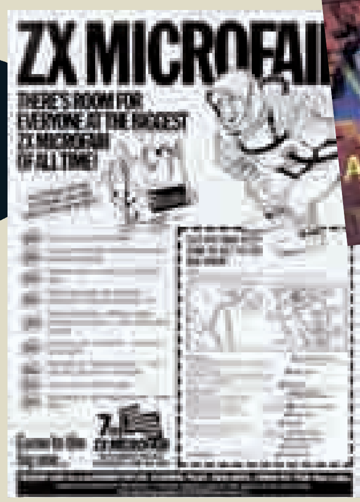
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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

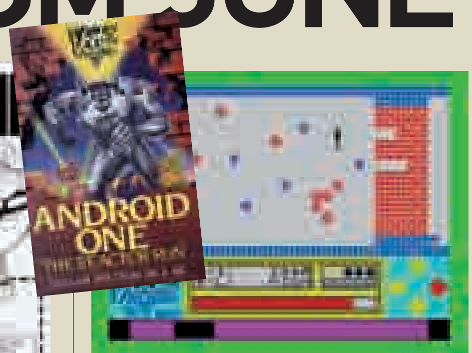
THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1983



June 1983 – a time of shows, fairs and computing events. Every weekend had something new for gamers to attend. A great time to see sneak previews of forthcoming hardware and software and, unwittingly, build up your software-house branded carrier-bag collection...



» The seventh ZX Micro Fair was such a resounding success the next one was booked for August. Ah, the good old days…



» *Android One* (Spectrum): Costa Panayi launched his Vortex career with this classic and followed it up with *TLL* & *Highway Encounter.*

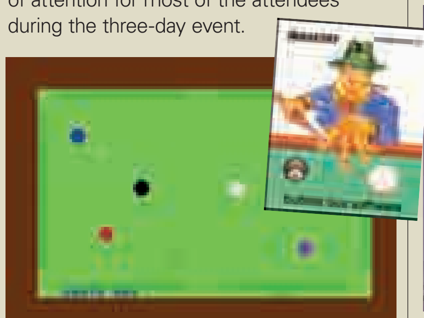
The seventh ZX Microfair at Alexandra Palace in London kicked things off on the 4 June with, predominantly, a mass of software houses showing off their wares to the drooling public. With the previous few months not having been particularly rich in new releases, companies were choosing to keep their powder dry in readiness for the hugely anticipated shows.

The Microfair didn't disappoint, with the vast majority of the 140 exhibitors being games producers. The software boom was kicking in and everyone had something they wanted to foist upon the casual bystander. With attendance figures of over 8,000 for the one-day show, there was certainly plenty of scope to relieve passers-by of their hard-earned cash.

While the usual suspects were in attendance, such as Sinclair, Bug-Byte and Quicksilva, there were also a large proportion of first time exhibitors including Vortex Software who was showing off its first two releases, *Gun Law* and *Android One: Reactor Run* – the latter by Costa Panayi. Other debutants included DK'Tronics showing *Gold Mine*, Artic Computing revealed 3D *Quadracube* and *Cosmic Debris*, while a small independent software house going by the name of Abbex released a utility, titled Super Talk, which created speech on the Spectrum.

Although the program was fairly average, the programmer certainly was not. This was the first commercial release by Dr David Aubrey Jones who later went on to produce massive selling classics such as *Ghostbusters* and *H.E.R.O.* for Activision and *Mercenary* for Novagen Software.

Computing rivals, Commodore, also had a major event running with the International Commodore Computer Show at the Cunard Hotel in London from 9-11 June. With over 70 exhibitors and a healthy 16,500 visitors, the show was a raging success and promised much for the future of the new (ish) C64, which was the centre of attention for most of the attendees during the three-day event.



» *Hustler* (C64): The Bubble Bus pool game got its first airing at the International Commodore Computer Show. Sink the pink!



» Acres of floor space, lots of promise but, ultimately, not enough visitors. Too many shows spoil the broth or something…

Smaller companies such as Llamasoft, Bubble Bus and Interceptor Micros also had a presence with previews of their forthcoming titles; *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, *Hustler* and *Krazy Kong* respectively. Commodore also revealed several new games released on ROM cartridge format including *International Soccer* and *Jupiter Lander.*

The Earls Court Computer Fair opened it's doors from 16-19 June with the lure of actually being able to see the long-awaited and much anticipated holy



» Despite a shaky outlook for the computing giants, Atari still managed to release four new computers at the Consumer Electronics Show in the USA.

grail of Spectrum data storage, the Sinclair Microdrive, in the flesh/plastic.

When the doors did open not only did the storage system not appear, neither did the crowds or the exhibitors. With so many shows based in London in the space of a few weeks, maybe apathy had set in with the computing public. The previous year's show had pulled in crowds of around 38,000 people, so the organisers of this show trebled the available floor space. Unfortunately, the extra space made the lack of attendees even more obvious.

There were some notable unveilings to be seen however. Amongst the new machines making debuts at the show were the Camputers Lynx, Memotech MTX500 and, the immensely forgettable, Laser 200 Colour Computer.

In the good old US of A, the annual Consumer Electronics Show was being held in Chicago from the 5-11 June. With the usual array of big-hitters such as Atari and Commodore in attendance it was interesting and slightly unusual to see that several UK computer manufacturers had infiltrated the show.

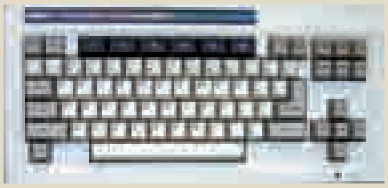
Dragon introduced America to its Dragon 32 machine following a licensing tie-up with Tano. Sinclair machines would be represented by US distributor Timex, who highlighted three new machines, all differing wildly from the conventional Sinclair machines. The new Timex trio were the TS2048, TS2068 and TS1500. The 2000 series included such luxuries as ROM slots and enhanced sound along with a more responsive keyboard. The TS1500 was a 2K version of the ZX81 but was built more robustly, in a similar vein to the Spectrum, and had a price tag of just $29.

Even Acorn wanted a piece of the American computing pie by unleashing the old BBC machine on an unsuspecting and, generally, unresponsive cheeseburger-munching public.

Other interesting curios on show at the CES included a keyboard add-on from CBS Electronics for the ColecoVision games console. It also went on to unveil the ColecoVision Adam system, a complete set-up for $600 that included a detachable keyboard, a printer, joysticks and a microdrive-like storage system, which caught many an admiring eye while at the show.



» It's new, it's white and has a keyboard the same colour as a Caramac bar, the newly released Laser 200 computer.

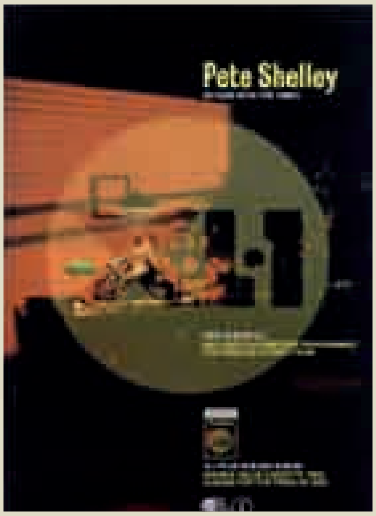

» ColecoVision's budget-priced package of computer, printer and various peripherals was warmly received yet didn't set store tills ablaze.

Atari, still struggling with financial problems, threw caution to the wind by releasing four new computers; the 600XL and 800XL, essentially the same but the 800XL having a 64K memory, and the 1400XL and 1450XL which both featured 64K RAM and a built-in modem.

Back in the UK, there was good news for Clive Sinclair, in the form of a knighthood in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. He celebrated the surprise award by revealing two of his research projects. He was already exploring the world of flat screen TV and its potential uses but was also investigating the possibility of producing an electric car. However, the first prototype Sinclair car designs would not be made public for at least 18 months, so no plans were fixed as yet. Sadly, there would be tears before bedtime…

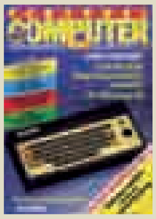
Commodore initiated the start of its battle to win over UK computer users with severe price-slashing of its C64 machine. To bring it into the same price structure as other machines, it was announced that the price would be lowered from around £350 to just under £200. The future for Commodore's old faithful, the Vic-20, looked to be uncertain…

An unusual software release this month saw the vinyl album, *XL1* by Pete Shelley, one of the founders of the Buzzcocks, featured a track, which could be loaded onto a Spectrum. The program played in sync with the music tracks, supplying



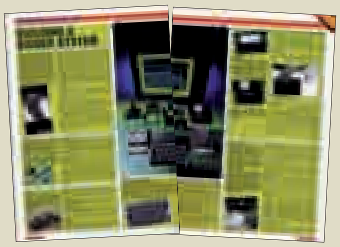
» The album came with a program offering you a Windows Media Player experience for the ZX Spectrum era. Good idea, poorly implemented.

WHAT THE MAGAZINES WERE SAYING…



Personal Computer News

PCN continued its foray into strange and wonderful machines by reviewing the Comx 35. Inside it concentrated on the mainstream with a pull-out feature on the various ways of building a better Sinclair Spectrum system with the multitude of add-ons and peripherals that were available at the time.

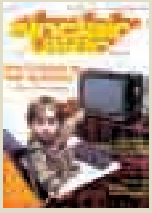




BBC Micro User

With Sinclair, Commodore and a variety of other multi-format computer shows occurring throughout June, the BBC Micro User Show in Manchester was one that may have slipped under your radar. A three-day extravaganza of all things Acorn, the show was set to run from 24-26 June.





Sinclair User

With the recent news that Sinclair was driving the current wave of pricing discounts on machines, making the 16K Spectrum the first colour computer in the UK priced under £100, it came as no surprise to see the new baldy knight of the realm splashing some eye-catching advertisements around the computing press to accentuate the cuts.

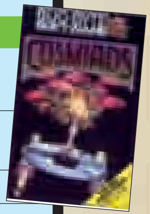


CHARTS

JUNE 1983

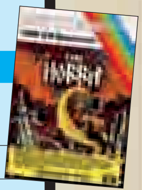
VIC-20

1 Cosmiads (Bug Byte)
2 Jelly Monsters (Commodore)
3 Vic Panic (Bug Byte)
4 Choplifter (Creative Software)
5 Skramble (Rabbit Software)



SPECTRUM

1 The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
2 Arcadia (Imagine)
3 Penetrator (Melbourne House)
4 Time Gate (Quicksilva)
5 Flight Simulation (Psion/Sinclair)



BBC

1 Planetoid (Acornsoft)
2 Rocket Raid (Acornsoft)
3 Snapper (Acornsoft)
4 Arcadians (Acornsoft)
5 Great Britain Ltd (Simon W Hessel Software)



MUSIC SINGLES CHART JUNE '83

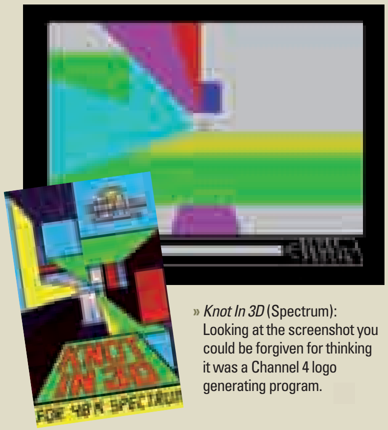
1 Every Breath You Take (Police)
2 Bad Boys (Wham!)
3 Nobody's Diary (Yazoo)
4 Buffalo Soldier (Bob Marley & The Wailers)
5 China Girl (David Bowie)



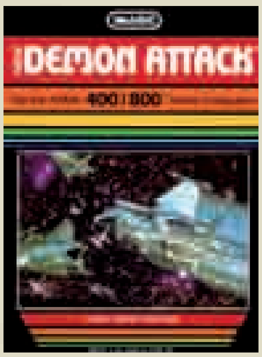




» The first UK tape based magazine. If you can read this, your tape is missing. Go and ask your newsagent.



» *Knot In 3D* (Spectrum): Looking at the screenshot you could be forgiven for thinking it was a Channel 4 logo generating program.




» *Demon Attack* (Atari 400/800): Imagic covert their Atari-annoying *Phoenix*-like game on… the Atari home computers. Have it my son!

visualisations and lyrics to the album. Unfortunately the finished product looked like something that was excluded from the *Horizons* tape for being a bit too rubbish.

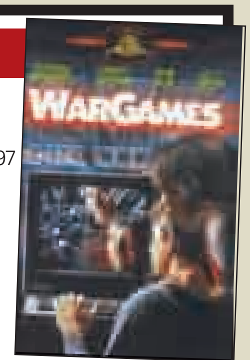
Spectrum Computing, a new tape-based magazine, got its first public airing this month. Available via mail order through Argus Specialist Publications it cost £2.99 and was the first commercially available tape-based magazine of its type in the UK. It did rather well over the coming months and it wasn't long before the formula was applied to other formats.

Liverpool, already awash with software houses large and small, could add yet another one to the list. New company, Lyversoft, released its first batch of games, all for the Commodore Vic-20 although other systems would be catered for in the future. Amongst its first releases were *Apple Bug*, *Demon Driver*, *Lunar Rescue* and *Space Assault*.

Demon Attack by Imagic, the Atari 2600 game that ruffled Atari's feathers for being vaguely similar to one of its unreleased games, got the conversion treatment with imminent releases on the Vic-20 and Atari 400/800 systems. That news probably cheered up Atari up no end…

NEWS

JUNE 1983



On 9 June, Margaret Thatcher, dubbed the Iron Lady, won her second General Election with a landslide victory over Labour with 397 seats against 209. The newly formed SDP, run by co-leaders David Owen and David Steel, managed to gain only 24 seats in their very first election.

Space news was abounds starting with Sally Kristen Ride, who became the first US woman to go into space. She was part of the crew on the seventh Space Shuttle mission which took off from Florida on 18 June, spending six days in space.

Staying in space, 13 June saw Pioneer 10 become the first manmade object to leave our solar system passing through the orbit of the outermost planet, Pluto (still a planet in those days). Launched in 1972, its mission finally came to an end in 1997 although it kept sending out signals up until January 2003.

June was a good month for movies with *War Games* premiering in the USA on 3 June, *Trading Places* on 8 June and *Superman III* on the 17. The UK had the magical eyebrow twitcher, Roger Moore playing James Bond, premiering in *Octopussy* in the UK on 6 June. Shplendid Mish Moneypenny… ah, wrong 007…



» On its journey through the solar system, Pioneer 10 got close to Jupiter and the rings around Uranus.

Malcolm Evans of New Generation Software announced that his latest creation, the mildly strange *Knot In 3D*, was ready to hit the shops and, after a recent run of quality gaming releases, such as *The Hobbit*, *Penetrator* and Horace Goes Skiing (sort of…) Melbourne House released *Terror-Daktil 4D* for the Spectrum.

The latest reviews from the latest issues of the magazines of the time included a couple of classics and a lot of mediocrity. Maybe all the previews copies were at all the shows rather than in staff writer's sweaty joystick-mangled hands?

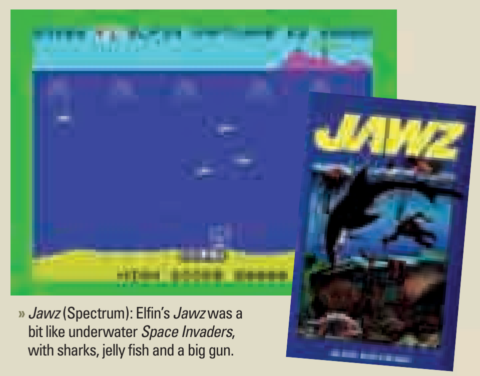
Computer & Video Games reviewed *Powerboat Race* (Futura Software, BBC), *Roman Empire* (Lothlorien, Spectrum), *Qix* (Atari, Atari), *Blind Alley* (Sunshine Software, Spectrum) and had a brief look at a new arcade game called *Xevious*.

Sinclair User took a look at the fantastically titled *Dr Bongo's Safari Park* (Custom Software), *Cyber Rats* and *Muncher* (both Silversoft), *Crevasse/ Hotfot* (Microsphere) and the less than impressive, *Embassy Siege* (ICL/Sinclair).

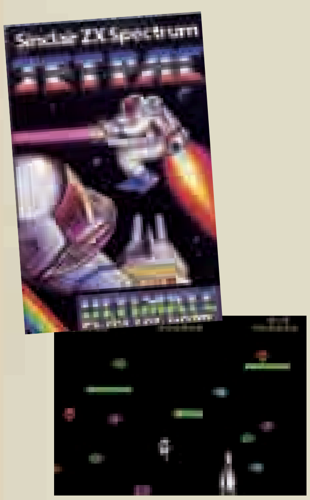
Readers of *BBC Micro User* had very little in the way of games reviews with *Great Britain Limited* and *Inheritance* (both Simon W Hessel Software) and *Countdown To Doom* (Acornsoft), as the choices for their potential gaming pleasure.

Home Computing Weekly highlighted a varied platter of titles including *Wacky Waiters* (Imagine, Vic-20), *Xeno II* (Anirog, Vic-20), *Jawz* (Elfin Software, Spectrum), *Froggy* (DJL Software, Spectrum), *Atom Smasher* (Romik, Vic-20) and *The Black Hole* (Quest, Spectrum).

They also featured one of the first reviews of *Jet Pac* for the Spectrum, the first game from new software house, Ultimate: Play The Game. Needless to say, it rated very highly…



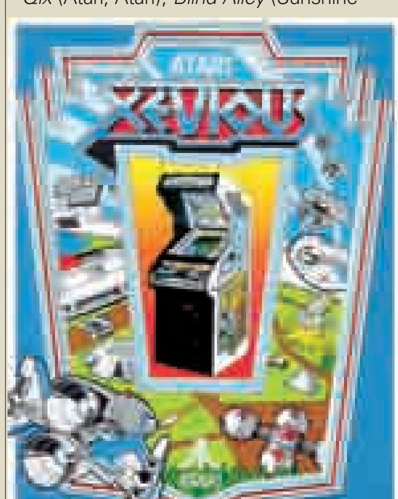
» *Jawz* (Spectrum): Elfin's *Jawz* was a bit like underwater *Space Invaders*, with sharks, jelly fish and a big gun.



» *Jet Pac* (Spectrum): Ultimate's first computer game and its arcade knowledge from earlier days was already noticeable in the excellent *Jet Pac*.



» *Terror-Daktil 4D* (Spectrum): Basically *Space Invaders* aided by swooping pterodactyls. Okay graphics but not a great game.



» One of the best vertical scrolling shooters, *Xevious*, the arcade game, gets previewed in the *C&VG* June '83 issue.

SHINOBI

NO BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR YOU



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

Spare a thought for poor old *Shinobi* this year. Despite sharing a 20th birthday with brother *After Burner*, parents Sega, have forgotten about its little ninja offspring.

For you see, while the recent release of *After Burner: Black Falcon* proudly updates Suzuki's classic arcade blaster for the PSP, no such release seems promised (PSP or otherwise) for the king of the ninjas.

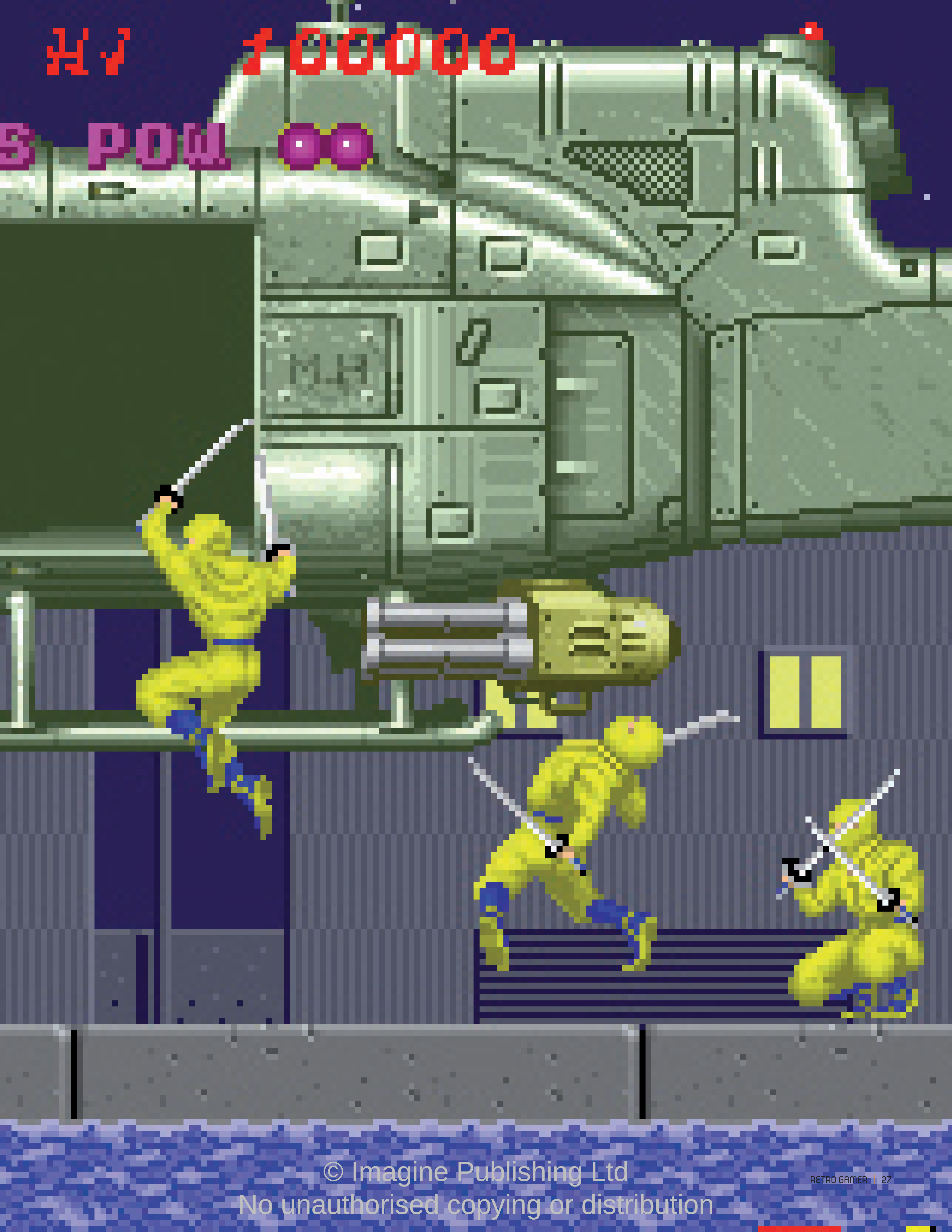
Of course, you can't really blame Sega (both *Shinobi* and sequel *Nightshade* on the PS2 didn't exactly set the sales charts alight) but it seems somewhat of a shame that it hasn't tried to capitalise on its venerable franchise reaching its big 2 0.

Therefore let us take a stroll down memory lane and remember what made the game so damned great in the first place. While it wasn't the prettiest game to be found in arcades at the time, *Shinobi* offered plenty of enjoyment for those that decided to chance ten pence on it.

The multi-tiered leaping from level to level was very reminiscent of Namco's *Rolling Thunder*, while the addition of a ninja lead made sure that Sega had the coolness factor well and truly sewn up. Then of course there was the fact that you were able to use ninja magic, throw shurikens, and even obtain the odd gun for greatly enhanced firepower. With a finite amount of children to rescue on each stage and some ruthless enemies to tackle, *Shinobi* never let up for a second and required your full concentration if you were to reach the end of each section and face off against the huge bosses that awaited you. While the likes of Ken-Oh proved fairly easy to vanquish, later foes – including the helicopter shown here) could be a right pig to beat; and wait until you reach the final level…

Still, once you did beat an end-of-level mayor you had the chance to earn a life in one of the greatest mini-games we have ever played. We would have shown it here but that goddamned helicopter is just too cool.

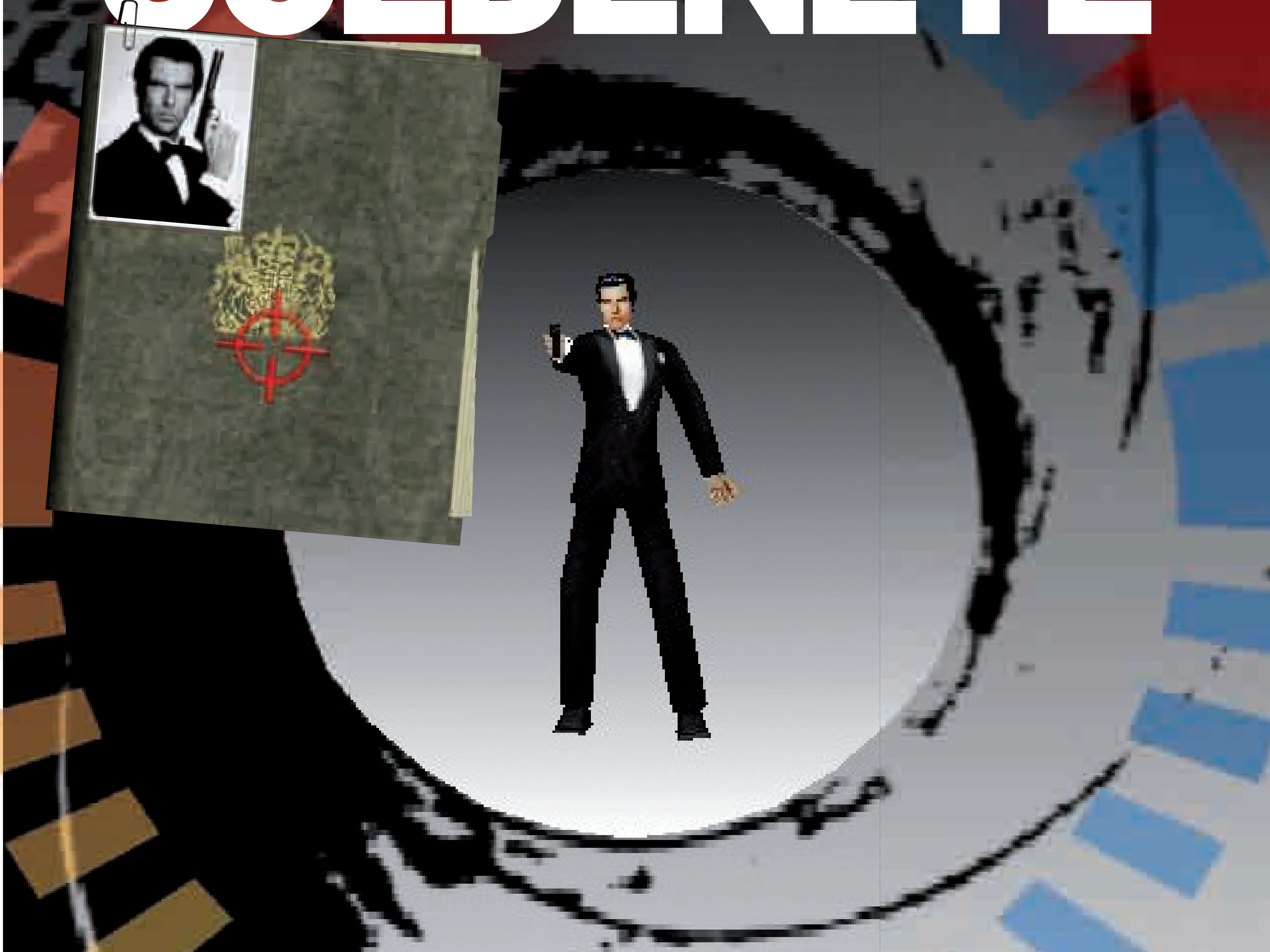




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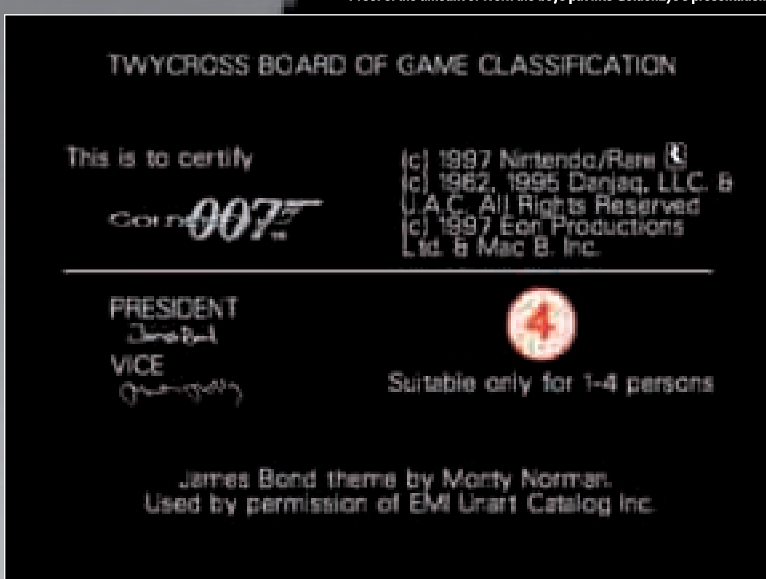
GOLDENEYE



A decade ago, first-person shooters were for PC gamers and Rare made very pretty platformers. Then GoldenEye came along and changed everything. We gather together four of the original development team – Dave Doak, Steve Ellis, Karl Hilton and Graeme Norgate – to tell us how they turned a film licence for a mysterious new console into the definitive console FPS. Paul Drury plugs in the joypads



» Proof of the amount of work the boys put into *GoldenEye*'s presentation.



Pub bores the world over be silenced. We know who the best Bond is. It's Roger Moore. Wait, come back. We have empirical evidence.

"Right near the end of development", explains Dave Doak, "a guy came in from EON who owned the Bond licence and saw we had put in Connery, Dalton and Moore as well as Brosnan. We thought it would be great for marketing and even some screenshots went out with Connery in his white tuxedo. Then an edict came down from on high and we had to get rid of the other Bonds, so on the day we had to take them out we played this epic deathmatch – first to a hundred kills – which went on for about three hours. Mark Edmonds played as Moore and won by one kill. It went down to the wire…"

GoldenEye's enthralling multiplayer shootouts were thus denied an intriguing proposition. But then the game was never conceived as a four-player grudge match. In fact, it wasn't even conceived as an FPS at all in the beginning. Karl Hilton recalls the first mooting of the project: "I started at Rare in October 1994 and they had me modelling cars and weapons to see if I could do it for no particular game. Martin Hollis wandered in – he tended to float around – and said he was leading a team to do a *Bond* game. I'd been highlighted as someone who might be interested and of course I was, but in the back of my mind I was thinking, Oh God, a film licence. The previous ones had been 2D *Robocop* or *Batman* games and they were generally awful. It seemed a risky project."

"THE FIRST THING I DID WAS MODEL THE GAS PLANT. YOU COULD FOLLOW A ROUTE THROUGH THE LEVEL LIKE IN VIRTUA COP. THEN WE DECIDED TO TAKE IT OFF THE RAILS" KARL HILTON

IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **GENRE:** FIRST PERSON SHOOTER
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TIMESPLITTERS
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2000

SECOND SIGHT
SYSTEMS: PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC
YEAR: 2004

HAZE
SYSTEMS: PS3, 360, PC
YEAR: DUE 2007





» The opening of each level perfectly captured the cinematic nature of the original film.

» We've lost count of the many hours we've spent playing *GoldenEye*'s superb multiplayer.



PLAY AND LEARN CHRIS

"We didn't know whether multiplayer was technically possible", admits Steve. "It was an experiment that didn't begin until May… and the game came out in August! I trawled through the code to find anything that referred to the player and made it work for more than one. I got it going for two first and then frame rates meant it couldn't work for all levels. Karl went off and built the Complex and Temple and had strict instructions not to put more than so many polygons and textures on screen. Then it was just a case of playing it.'

Graeme: "I first saw it as four-player split screen and said, 'Wow Martin, you've got multiplayer!' He was, 'Oh no, no, you didn't see that, it's a complete secret…' The concern was that half the coding team was being allocated to some frivolous thing that might not work. The Stampers had actually said, no multiplayer. Chris Stamper wondered that if you had four view ports on screen so you could see what others were doing, how could it possibly be fun?!'



Initially, the intention was to do a 2D side-scrolling platformer for the SNES, a genre that Rare excelled in after the seminal *Donkey Kong Country*, but Hollis insisted the game should be in 3D and produced for Nintendo's enigmatic Ultra 64, which was still in development. He also made explicit his design model: Sega's lightgun arcade hit *Virtua Cop*.

Karl: "When I got involved, the first thing I did was model the gas plant. We put a spline (sic) through the level so you could follow a route like in *Virtua Cop*, but it didn't go further than that. We decided to take it off the rails. Some of those early builds had bits missing because you'd never be able to see them and I remember going back and filling in the holes."

GoldenEye was forging its own path, a departure from the Rare games that had gone before. When you consider that this was the first project for eight of the nine team members, that was perhaps to be expected. They may have been inexperienced, but they were unfettered by expectations of what a game could and couldn't be. They turned naivety into ambition and the enforced isolation of this happy band – "Rare organised teams into separate barns and you only had keys to your particular cell block", quips Dave – meant that the newbies on the team had to find their own way.

"Because it was most people's first game", explains Graeme Norgate, "we did things we might not do again because it was too much work. We didn't take the easy route. If something sounded like a good idea, it was like, 'Yeah let's do it!' The world was our oyster! Only afterwards would you find it was a world of pain."

At least it was a world of their own making. "It was untrammelled by arseholes", explains Dave. "Nowadays, publishers get people who don't know about games to run projects. We hadn't worked on a game before but the difference was we were having to do the work. Our wish-list of features would be things we knew would be good and we could do. There was some smart hiring and cherry-picking of people. We all had ambition and were hardworking. That's how he managed to get that much content out of us."

> "'GOLDENEYE'S NOT YOUR UNIVERSITY PROJECT' TIM STAMPER TOLD US ONE DAY! AS HEADS OF RARE, THE STAMPERS PROBABLY HAD TO MAKE A LOT OF EXCUSES" STEVE ELLIS ON WHY THE GAME APPEARED TWO YEARS AFTER THE FILM

Martin also encouraged the team to draw on their love of the *Bond* films they'd grown up with. He recognised the inherent appeal of playing as the suave hero who had defined cool for so many aspiring young agents over the preceding decades. No longer would you simply be a floating gun as in *Doom*. Now you were England's deadliest weapon.

Karl: "I remember the first time we got Bond's hand in with the watch. We



» Limited shooting and careful movement enabled you to make your way stealthily through many levels.



» The sniper rifle, a joy to use and essential for getting the drop on the enemy.

scanned it in and modelled it up and it had the cuff of the white tuxedo. I thought, hey, I'm James Bond! And then we put that thing in where the camera flies into the back of Bond's head at the start of a level. It tied you in."

A key part of that appeal was the infamous Licence to Kill. *GoldenEye* was a first-person shooter of course, but the decision to recognise body-specific hits introduced a new subtlety to the genre. Shoot a guard in the leg and he reacts differently to if you blasted him in the chest. Each part of the body was given a weighting, expressed as a fraction. Hit a limb or the torso and your enemy would be pushed closer to a damage count of one and death. Or you could go straight for the head. A bullet in the brain equalled one. Instant death. One-shot kills.

Headshots were not only disturbingly satisfying though. They created a whole new way to play. Dave explains: "The way detection worked was very simple but fundamentally changed the set-up. Whenever you fired a gun, it had a radius test and alerted the non-player characters within that radius. If you fired the same gun again within a certain amount of time, it did a larger radius test and I think there was a third even larger radius after that. It meant if you found one guy and shot him in the head and then didn't fire again, the timer would reset. It wasn't realistic but it meant the less you shot, the quieter you were, the less enemies came after you. If an NPC that hadn't been drawn and was just standing in a room waiting was alerted by gunfire, it would duplicate itself and one went to investigate. You can see it happening sometimes – if you go to the right place and make a noise, you see more enemies spawning."

Stay hidden, keep quiet, make every shot count… almost inadvertently, the team had invented stealth gaming. Of course you could still go in all guns blazing, but once players got to grips with the sniper rifle and realised that enemies had distinct blind spots to exploit – they could only 'see' you if they could walk to you in a straight line, meaning you could peer out from behind cover or line up a fatal headshot through windows – the sneaky approach was not only appealing, it was vital in successfully completing many of the game's trickier missions. It was a surreptitious tactic that emerged naturally, rather than being pre-determined.

Karl: "When we had plenty of film material, we tried to stick to it for authenticity but we weren't afraid of adding to it to help the game design. It was very organic. Dave would come in and say he needed an extra door and a room somewhere and we'd add it in. Back then, it was so much quicker. It'd be half a day's work to add in a new corridor and a room."

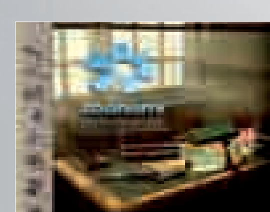
This sense of freedom to try new things, to experiment with level design, play it exhaustively and let the experience determine what direction development would go was crucial to how the team worked. They weren't enslaved to a rigid design document, meaning everyone could contribute to game design. Nothing was set in stone. Not even the hardware.

Considering how the finished *GoldenEye* feels so suited to the N64, it's easy to forget the machine didn't exist for the first year and a half of its development. The team was using SGI Onyxs, hugely expensive Silicon Graphics machines, guessing at what the specs of Nintendo's new console might be and using a butchered Saturn controller to playtest. As it turned out, when they finally received the finished console they were pleasantly relieved. Despite costing a fraction of the SG workstations, fortunately Nintendo had come good on most of its promises. "The processor ended up being three quarters of what they had told us", explains Steve. "We had to cut the textures down by half."

M SPEAKS

We managed to catch a word with the man responsible for overseeing the *GoldenEye* project, Martin Hollis. So, having assembled his team, were they a handful to manage? "That's a cheeky question", replies Martin, "and I like it. I'm not a terribly dictatorial manager. Oh they were fabulous because we all fitted together so well. We did have a shared vision, which happened naturally and everyone knew what *Bond* was about which helped us to get there. So no, they weren't difficult to manage. Now if you asked my management about me, they might tell a different story…"

Martin continued to lead the team as they began work on *Perfect Dark*, but left Rare in 1998 to set up his own company, Zoonami. Visit its website www.zoonami.com for a transcript of the fascinating speech he gave at the European Developers Forum in 2004 on the making of *GoldenEye* plus details of the company's recently released game, *Zendoku*. "Think Sudoku meets ninjas", he says helpfully. Martin's favourite Bond girl is Jane Seymour and he assures us he could have triumphed over his former colleagues if he'd been part of the developer deathmatch and we've convinced him to be a future castaway for *Desert Island Discs*. Result.



FREE AT LAST

While *GoldenEye* was instrumental in popularising the console FPS and introduced a myriad of new ideas to the genre, the game has a very tangible legacy to those that worked on it. Steve: "Free Radical Design was set up on the back of *GoldenEye*. It led us to signing a deal in the first place. It opened doors for us to do what we've gone on to do." FRD has gone on to become a major creative force in FPS development, producing the *TimeSplitters* series and currently working on *Haze* for PS3 due out later this year. Success has seen the Nottingham-based company grow enormously and with 160 employees and relationships with publishers such as EA, Ubisoft and LucasArts, have the boys ever considered going back to *Bond*? Karl: "It's been suggested at times by people, but publishers have to pay so much for the *Bond* licence it puts them off. Actually, it would be good to do *GoldenEye* again with new technology and do things we wanted to first time." Before we all get too excited though, he adds: "If FRD did a *Bond* game I'm sure it would be good, but there's no GoldenEye magic dust you can sprinkle on."

Unfortunate, but not a disaster. And they coped with the reduction in admirable retro fashion. "A lot of *GoldenEye* is in black and white", admits Karl, rather surprisingly. "RGB colour textures cost a lot more in terms of processing power. You could do double the resolution if you used greyscale, so a lot was done like that. If I needed a bit of colour, I'd add it in the vertex."

As their semi-colourful *Bond* world was taking shape on the small screen, the film it was based on was nearing completion. The team had received the script very early in development and visited the set at Leavesden Studios, housed in an old Rolls Royce factory, half a dozen times. "We had really good access", says Karl. "We could walk anywhere and photograph what we needed. After the first few visits, I realised we needed textures. I started taking photos of walls!"

Visiting the filmset undoubtedly helped cement the game world in the minds of the team, but it also reminded Rare that the clock was ticking. While trying to release the game in tandem with the film had never been considered a viable proposition, the thought of it not appearing until the next *Bond* movie hit cinemas instilled an understandable sense of urgency.

Steve: "'It's not your university project' Tim Stamper told us one day! As heads of Rare, the Stampers probably had to make a lot of excuses. That's what we have to do these days. Why isn't it out yet? Why is it crap? We never had to answer those!"

Perhaps the Stamper Brothers' greatest contribution to *GoldenEye* was fending off such enquiries and allowing the team time to develop a 3D game in what were still uncharted waters. Being able to play *Mario 64* on the new console was a key influence.

Dave: "When *Mario* arrived it was clearly a step forward. Martin was obsessed with the collision detection, which was obviously doing it in 3D and *GoldenEye* was essentially using a 2D method. And our story was only about shooting stuff – we needed other things. We started putting in objectives, like meeting people in a level and back then that involved some complicated AI. Finding Boris, guiding him through and making him decode something… that wasn't easy! Other levels, you could hear the barrel being scraped – collect five arbitrary pieces and go here, but *Mario* had plenty of that shit, which is pretty boring. We punctuated it with stuff like go and blow this thing up! Like the canisters at the end of Arkhangelsk. It's in the film and we could have just said go here and press X – Karl had built that in the background but it wasn't going to explode. But wouldn't it be nice if it did? So the canisters became a 'prop'. A bloody big prop. And the explosion had to be big enough to mask you switching one object with another. But then if it's a gas plant, shouldn't we have gas? We can't do f*cking gas, but we have got fog… maybe we could change the fog settings? Can we use that more than once? Maybe in the Egypt setting?"

For a game with more than its fair share of wanton destruction, the team became remarkably good at recycling. The radar on multiplayer mode is actually an oil drum texture, which explains the cloudiness on the right, and sometimes whole levels were created with the detritus they had to hand.

Karl: "As the engine got better, we were very good at reusing things. We decided we'd do the meeting room from *Moonraker*, which I just loved. We couldn't do it round, that was just too expensive, but we did a square version and linked it with being under the shuttle. Dave said those chairs just have got to fold down like in the film so we did it with door code. I remember one chair always folded wrong, but it would have taken so much coding to get it right, it was like, hey, leave it as a bug! The shuttle was made from reused satellite textures and to make it take off, we used grenade explosions. That whole level is a big hack job, but it's one of the nicest looking."

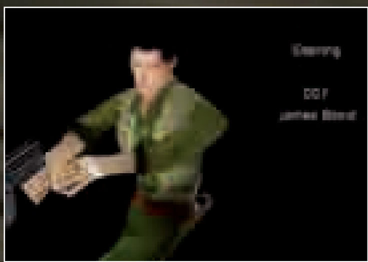
GoldenEye was always good at giving you the big picture, from the dramatic bungee jump down Byelomorye dam at the opening to the final shoot out on the Antenna Cradle, but much of its enduring charm



» Ahh, the beauty of the doorway. It provides a perfect bottleneck to take out enemies.



» (From left to right) Karl, Steve and Graham were more than happy to revisit *GoldenEye's* multiplayer when Retro Gamer turned up with its N64.


» Here's the man himself, tuxedo noticeably absent.

is in the detail. Bullet holes in glass, graceful forward rolls, hats being blown off heads and the knocking knees of terrified scientists.

"Those are Duncan Botwood's knees", laughs Karl. "He wasn't a professional actor, he was one of the team! There was only one big motion-capture shoot and we realised someone was going to surrender at some point, so it was, 'Put your hands up and shake your knees'. Then it would be, 'Stand there and we'll push you over'. I think we must have breached Health and Safety quite a lot…"

Graeme: "Duncan's line was, 'I had to die a million times for *GoldenEye*'. There were plenty of times when we'd get him to close his eyes and he didn't know when he was going to be pushed. He went through a lot for the game. There was blood."

It wasn't the only occasion when the nearest warm body was put to good use. Alongside the faces of Pierce Brosnan, Robbie Coltrane et al, Bea Jones scanned in virtually all the staff at Rare. At the start of each level, five faces from the extensive collection are picked at random and plonked on the bodies of your adversaries. All the development team are in there and Karl remains rather proud of the manly scar added to his own mug. More cameos were to follow, explains Steve.

"There are a few monitors in the game – one has Dave in sunglasses and a Russian hat Karl had bought in Berlin, there's one with Mark in a bowler hat on a skateboard and another has Karl doing a Python silly walk. We were just trying to make the monitors seem alive."

A notable omission are the Stamper Brothers, who declined the opportunity to have their faces featured in the game, perhaps wary of giving employees the chance to shoot their bosses at close range. But the brothers' faith in the project, protecting the team from outside interference and giving them the space to produce the best game they possibly could, means they can hold their heads high. So many of the things that make *GoldenEye* special – the bonus Aztec and Egyptian levels, the AI that sees guards dashing for alarms and the wonderful multiplayer mode (see boxout) – were the result of not having to rush out a product to meet a demoralising deadline.

Steve: "The reason it turned out so well is that no one was standing over you saying you don't need to do that, move on to the next bit. I was on the explosions for a month and I didn't have someone telling me I'd had a week and that was enough. If there had been, the game might have been out on time…"

But it wouldn't have been the game it turned out to be. The entire team flew out to E3 in 1997 to present a 99 per cent complete version of *GoldenEye* and while the game was well received, no one predicted the phenomenal success that followed. A staggering 8 million copies were sold worldwide and it remains the biggest selling N64 game in the USA, outdoing *Mario 64*, *Ocarina Of Time* and *Mario Kart*. "Actually, I was concerned it wouldn't be able to compete with *Turok*", admits Karl. "That looked better and had a better frame rate… and dinosaurs!"

Laughter all round and an appropriate juncture for the team to pick up their pads and revisit the game that marked their entry into the industry. As Steve plays through the opening level, memories are triggered like sticky mines. How Martin had done a 3D gun barrel that had to be dropped due to frame rate issues; how code had been written to let you drive the van, but it caused too many problems if you got the vehicle stuck in a dead end; how the unreachable island you can see far in the distance from atop the dam originally had a solitary guard patrolling it; how they'd had to label certain wall textures as 'floor' so guards could 'see' you,


» The name's Bond… James Bond.

which meant they would occasionally leap out of bunkers inexplicably. "At one point, we were going to have reloading done by the player unplugging and re-inserting the rumble pack on the controller", remembers Steve. "Nintendo weren't keen on that idea and I think it might have affected the pacing a bit…"


» Dave Doak discovers that he still has that multiplayer magic. Just not enough to beat Steve Ellis.

So to the main event – a ten-minute deathmatch – and as our four agents trade headshots and insults, they start to reel off the things *GoldenEye* pioneered. The sniper rifle, the gun disconnected from the camera, the civilian AI, the 3D explosions, the environment mapping (look closely at a shiny surface and you'll notice a low resolution reflection of your surroundings), body-specific hit reactions and the tasty option of dual-wielding weapons. "Didn't *Halo 2* invent that seven years later?" chuckles Karl. The list goes on, yet more fundamentally, they proved that a story driven FPS, a genre previously confined to PCs, could triumph on a console. Countless others have followed, but *GoldenEye* remains a benchmark.

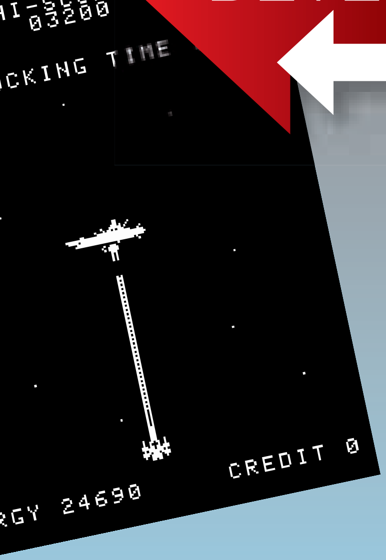
And the winner? Appropriately enough, Steve, the creator of the multiplayer mode, nicks it by a single kill. Then the defeated trio realise he's been playing as Oddjob, whose diminutive stature bestows a distinct advantage and the room echoes with cries of cheat and demands for a rematch.

GoldenEye: still inflaming passions ten years on.

"FOR THE MOTION CAPTURE, WE'D GET DUNCAN TO CLOSE HIS EYES AND HE DIDN'T KNOW WHEN HE WAS GOING TO BE PUSHED. HE WENT THROUGH A LOT FOR THE GAME. THERE WAS BLOOD" GRAEME NORGATE ON WHY THOSE GUARDS LOOK LIKE THEY'RE REALLY FEELING IT



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



SNK (PART ONE)

ASK ANY GAMER TODAY ABOUT SNK, AND THE RESPONSES WILL ALWAYS BE NEO GEO, KING OF THE FIGHTERS AND METAL SLUG. BUT AS MIKE TOOLEY REVEALS, SNK WAS AND IS SO MUCH MORE. SO WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, HERE'S AN SNK FEATURE THAT MENTIONS NONE OF THE ABOVE. WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE ALREADY HAVE?

IN BRIEF

Initially formed in 1978 by Eikichi Kawasaki, SNK first entered the videogames market with two arcade titles: *Ozma Wars* and *Safari Rally*. It found huge success with scrolling shoot-'em-up *Vanguard* and later entered the console market with the likes of the Neo-Geo AES and Neo-Geo Pocket. Despite having massive success in the mid Nineties with the likes of *Metal Slug* and *The King of Fighters* franchises,the company closed in 2000, only to be resurrected as Playmore by Kawasaki.

SNK (Shin Nihon Kikaku) exploded onto the gaming scene in the early Eighties. Its rise to prominence and subsequent fall, which was then followed by a dramatic and unexpected rebirth, is so much more than just a company history. By chronicling SNK a picture emerges of the games industry and its nuances for the last quarter of a century; indigenous and regional differences that still exist today are prominent while demonstrating that innovation was never a guarantee for success.

Japan, America and the United Kingdom have always been gaming superpowers. The US nurtured Atari – the pioneers of videogames through the Seventies and early Eighties – allowing a company to become an industry, whilst Apple, Commodore and Texas Instruments bolstered America's armoury as the onslaught into homes and arcades started to gather pace.

In the United Kingdom software and hardware innovation was driven by the likes of Sir Clive Sinclair, Ian Livingstone, the Stamper brothers, and even the BBC and British Telecom were founding driving forces. With their gaze and application fixed solely on software and hardware for the home markets, they planted the seeds and reaped the rewards as they marched into, and eventually conquered Europe.

In Japan things couldn't have been more different. Home software development was rare and home hardware manufacture even more so. From the very early years it was only Toshiba's MSX computer range that had any quantifiable success. Nintendo had its Game & Watch handhelds and Bandai's tabletop machines ruled game stores. But it was the arcades that the Japanese designers chose as the stage to enthral the masses. Taito and Namco had given the world *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* – two of the biggest games of



all time. In Japan it seemed that anyone involved in arcade production at the time could make successful arcade games.

By the late Seventies, SNK, the embodiment of an idea by Eikichi Kawasaki, was already in the software and hardware business, albeit far removed from the part of the industry that was responsible for the growth in arcade machines. Formed in July 1978, SNK hailed from Osaka, creating hardware and business solutions for corporate clients. After witnessing the success of Namco and Taito, Kawasaki further expanded SNK by offering the design, development and marketing of standalone coin-operated cabinets to its core business.

IN 1979 SNK readied and released two games from its new arcade arm into Japanese arcades. Both games would share Taito's 8080 hardware, which had hosted the unstoppable *Space Invaders* the year before. The first release, *Ozma Wars*, would become indicative of SNK's success and struggles for years to come. A vertical shooter, the game substituted lives for a health bar (a gaming first) and played out over different levels (another first), aliens were replaced with comets, asteroids and UFOs, and at the end of certain waves the players craft would dock with a mother ship to replenish its health (you guessed it, another first). The second title, *Safari Hunt* was a peculiar mix of a maze game and a driving game, which in truth was too evolved for a then primitive gaming public. Avoiding cars and navigating a maze was the game's main prerequisite and score was amassed by killing animals. Both games received modest but steady returns from the arcades, instantly finding a home with gamers who were looking for something a little different from the norm. Unfortunately, these machines and their monochrome displays aged prematurely as Taito launched *Space Invaders 2* in late '79. Arcades became bathed in colour; monochrome games had had their day and revenues dropped accordingly.

SNK responded with 1980's colourful *Sazuke Vs. Commander*, a surprisingly simple fighter that fell some way short of SNK's earlier endeavours. It generated moderate revenue in the arcades, but it was SNK's next in-house project that would bring the company massive success and see it evolve into an arcade force.

Undeterred by moderate revenues and learning fast about the fledgling arcade industry, its consumers and their tastes, Kawasaki went back to the drawing board to sketch out the blueprint for a game which would become the embodiment of all he had learned over the previous 18 months and would subsequently begin a genre – *Vanguard*.

Released in Japan so late in 1980 it was almost 1981, *Vanguard* was a side-scrolling shooter that would become the genesis later that year to Konami's *Scramble*, and could arguably be called the forerunner to the *Gradius* series. Easy to write off today as a vintage curiosity, *Vanguard* was a measured and well-realised success for SNK. The music that played out over the attract mode was taken from John Williams' theme to *Star Trek The Motion Picture* – one of that year's must see films – and power-ups were scored to Vulcan's theme from that year's *Flash Gordon* movie. Digitised voices provided introductions to each level, and the game itself mesmerised gamers with its flamboyant use of colour to depict the game world, four-way fire and power-ups. More importantly to gamers though, it was the first time that a game had allowed progress to be measured by distance as well as score, a game with a mission statement and a visible end. For SNK its first arcade smash would prove so popular that its entire business would change.

By looking at Japanese consumers' pastimes away from gaming, Kawasaki soon realised where gaming should have an interface into other mediums. This worked well with

UNIVERSALLY GIFTED

Paul Jacobs joined SNK in 1985. His enthusiasm for the industry was dented during his time at Universal, as various political instigators within the entertainment divisions vied for dominance. This, and Universal's court battles, put so many demands on his time that he felt he was becoming removed from the business he loved – games. Unlike his peers, as the industry crashed he resolved to remain, only for Universal to announce that despite success in the arcades it would progress the winding down and eventual closure of gaming operations.

Despite early reservations about SNK, "On paper they looked viable, but at the time they looked so overstretched," he told *Replay* magazine in an interview during 1986. "It was meeting Kawasaki that won me over, he was so enthused about the game industry and believed SNK would be world leaders, at the end of our first meeting I believed it to." Jacobs proved invaluable to SNK with his contacts in the States and Europe; it was this relationship that paved the way for SNK in the US, and the eventual souring of this relationship that would cause chaos and end one of SNK's greatest opportunities.



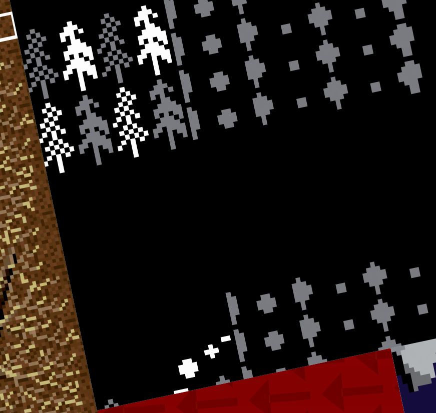


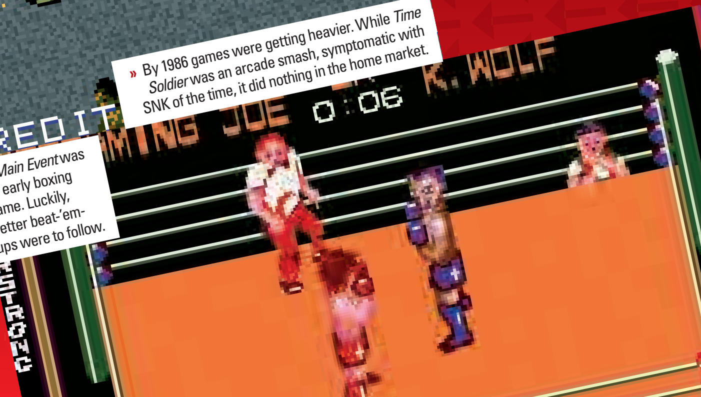
» While SNK tended to re-use the same MVS cabinets, the lightgun using *Beast Busters* required additional hardware.





» By 1986 games were getting heavier. While *Time Soldier* was an arcade smash, symptomatic with SNK of the time, it did nothing in the home market.





» *Main Event* was an early boxing game. Luckily, better beat-'em-ups were to follow.



IT'S ALL IN THE NAME…

Throughout the Eighties SNK created over 40 titles for the arcade. Despite varying degrees of success, all the games were hallmarked with a standard that made them stand out. Key to the SNK business model were complicated licensing agreements, which provided SNK with a risk free way of transposing its games into new markets, but it also created a branding issue. It wasn't unusual for gamers to play an SNK game and think that it was by Tradewest or indeed Romstar, even today it is common misconception that *Vanguard* was made by Atari. Then there was Elite who would win many accolades for *Ikari Warriors*, not as a conversion but as a standalone game. As the Nineties approached SNK would resolve to remedy this situation in ways not seen before or since.

Vanguard in the home market, but it wasn't until Centruri bought the licence for North America distribution rights that the global ratification of this ideal was realised.

Debuting in 1981 on US shores, *Vanguard* was an immediate success. So much so that Centuri's initial revenue forecasts for the year were met within a month. Such was the success that Centuri found it difficult to manufacture enough machines and so SNK started to manufacture and distribute the game itself in North America.

By late 1981 Atari executives, impressed by *Vanguard*'s impact, licensed it for use on all of its home systems, which at the time were the number one entertainment systems in the States. Despite only licensing the game to Atari and not having any direct input into the translations, the revenue generated here would secure SNK's future for a long time to come; *Vanguard* itself would go on to dominate the game charts, and it would be this income that would see SNK through the games crash of the early Eighties.

Evolving the business again, Kawasaki set about creating a US division of SNK and in October 1981 SNK Of America Corporation was born, based in Sunny Dale California. Kawasaki appointed John Rowe to head up the operation. SNK of America would distribute SNK arcade cabinets throughout the US, and feedback cultural nuances and trends to Japan allowing the rapidly expanding SNK to develop and licence games that were relevant to global consumer tastes.

SNK Japan and America combined to bring to market 20 arcade machines by the end of 1984. Varying in quality and with no discernable hallmarks, these games stood as individual pieces of artistry but did little to help gamers see SNK as a brand. Even 1984's *Vanguard 2* had little to set it apart from other games; visually it looked like a recreation of Namco's *Xevious* and gamers weren't impressed.

Incomes were slowing as the arcade marketplace became less prevalent in youth culture, forcing many arcades out of business and those that remained demanded higher returns from cabinets. It was becoming almost impossible to drive a business forward through arcade revenues alone. Kawasaki looked to Europe and the boom in 8-bit computers; videogaming was massive in Europe, despite the crash in America. Kids in Europe were playing more games than ever, but they weren't playing them in arcades; they were playing them across a myriad of home systems. At that time though, Europe's home computer market was fragmented and many popular systems were looking tired; to Kawasaki at least, the European gaming scene looked like the US gaming scene prior to its crash. The decision was therefore made to only licence games in Europe outside of the arcades. SNK Japan had to find a way of driving SNK forward without Europe.

Nintendo was readying the Famicom for a US release; Kawasaki was so impressed with the machine that he created a second SNK arm in America, this time called SNK Home Entertainment, which would enable SNK to become a third-party developer. SNK could now put its games into kids' homes across Japan and the US, on Kawasaki's own terms.

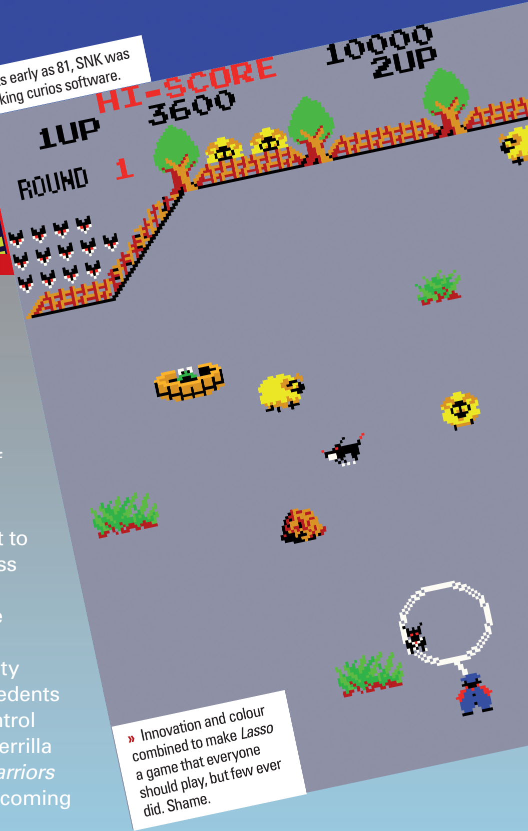
Things didn't go well at first, as John Rowe announced that he was leaving SNK to found Tradewest. Losing a key figure in their business, SNK Japan suddenly had a major problem. Both of its American companies were leaderless and as a consequence, were unproductive. SNK Japan had to find the right person and they had to find them fast. Enter Paul Jacobs.

Jacobs, who had been presiding over Universal's arcade division up until the games crash of 1983, had left Universal in 1984 after the company announced that it would begin to wind up its arcade division. Jacobs was part of the company that had not only brought *Space Panic*, the first platform



» This isometric shooter was insanely popular throughout the Japanese and US arcades.

» As early as 81, SNK was making curios software.



» Innovation and colour combined to make *Lasso* a game that everyone should play, but few ever did. Shame.

game, and *Mr Do!,* the biggest arcade game of 1982, to the arcade masses but more significantly had acted in a consultant role on Universal's laser disc technology.

The idea of which was to create a universal cabinet that just required a disc change to install a new game. This pioneering thinking wasn't lost on Kawasaki – a hardware technologist and businessman himself, he understood perfectly the benefits of a system such as this. Somewhat surprisingly, the concept found itself put on hold for almost a decade as Kawasaki focused the companies' energies on the US and Japanese arcade markets, while using licensing to develop SNK into a global brand in the home market.

Suitably impressed by Jacobs, Kawasaki and the now burgeoning SNK Japan decided that he had the experience and industry knowledge to be able to run both arms of its American business independently of Japan, allowing the fast becoming giant Japanese company to focus its attentions solely on arcade hardware.

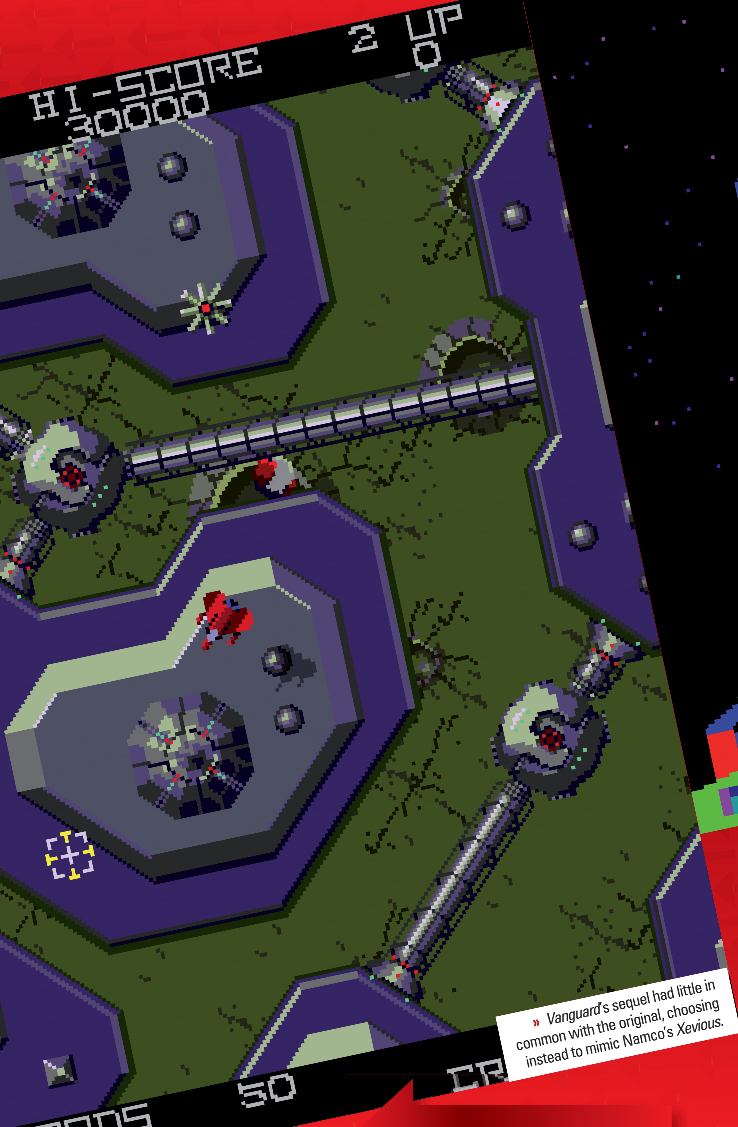
This arrangement would deliver SNK onto the world stage once and for all; everything was in place for them to compete with Taito, Konami and Capcom for an arcade foothold, but for the first time SNK had a real advantage. America was the world's foremost purveyor of culture in the Eighties, and by having a US arm, SNK could tailor its arcade development to current US trends, helping SNK deliver relevance to the huge US market. This also meant that by the time a trend hit Japan and Europe, SNK already had a game that ticked many boxes of the gamer's psyche, effectively piggy backing other media. As far as games were concerned, SNK was the new black.

It was 1986, however, that saw the realisation of Kawasaki's dream of continuity between cultures. Movies like *Commando* and *Rambo II* were touching a nerve with movie goers everywhere and Paul Hardcastle's *19* was dominating European music charts – war and muscle-bound hulks with guns were vogue. Hollywood had the iconic movies of war; Europe had the soundtrack to war. Japan had SNK, and SNK had the game of war, *Ikari Warriors*.

Produced in-house at SNK Japan by Keiko Ijo – then a recent technology student and new recruit to SNK Japan – few would have predicted the success of her first game. When asked today about *Ikari,* Keiko is almost dismissive: "I just wanted to make a game that had half-dressed men walking up the screen, shooting things," she says. Keiko's modesty and good humour cannot disguise the many precedents that were set by *Ikari.* Allowing players to take control of Ralf Jones and Clark Steel, the jungle-based guerrilla warfare entranced players the world over. *Ikari Warriors* was undoubtedly SNK's tentative step towards becoming hardcore and was an absolute smash.

Looking beyond the game, *Ikari* illuminated a new SNK. Two versions of *Ikari* were launched for the arcade: the standard SNK board would power the games built in Japan, while the JAMMA version was licensed to Tradewest as a conversion system, replete with 12-way directional pad

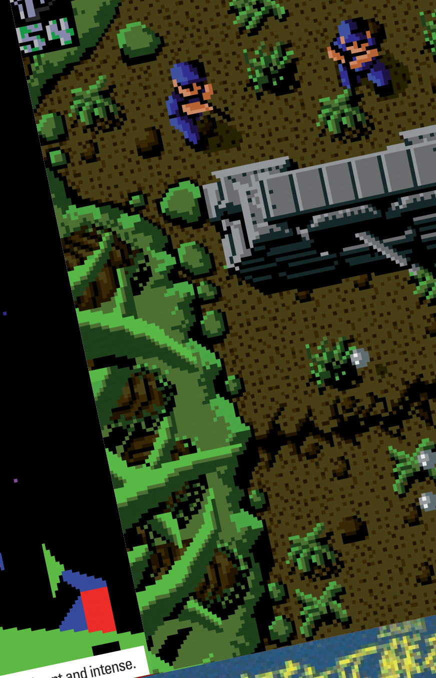
SETTING UP AN AMERICAN ARM DELIVERED SNK ONTO THE WORLD STAGE ONCE AND FOR ALL… SNK WAS THE NEW BLACK



» *Vanguard*'s sequel had little in common with the original, choosing instead to mimic Namco's *Xevious*.



» *Satan Of Saturn* was vibrant and intense.




» *Guerrilla War* in all its glory. Which game would this eventually become? Answer next month.



converters that would allow old cabinets to house the game and its control mechanism of joystick, paddle and fire button.

With interest from Europe Kawasaki took the advice of Jacobs and started a bidding war for the home licences. Elite would bring the game to Europe on all major 8-bit and 16-bit formats, and indeed even published on some formats outside of Europe. The real shock of this bidding war, though, was that Tradewest was only given rights to produce the US CBM 64 version of *Ikari*. Although Tradewest got to market two full years before Elite, SNK prevented it from distributing outside of America.

The lucrative NES licence was handed to Micronics, a small US developer whose business was run solely as a conversion agent for arcade software houses. Unaccredited on many of their works, Micronics fitted SNK perfectly – an arcade smash on the biggest system in America still carrying the SNK brand. While it may have seemed at the time that the Tradewest snub was petty, the truth was that despite sustained success and countless hit games, SNK was still largely unknown outside of Japan. Most gamers knew *Ikari*, but few could tell you who had made it, and even if they could they couldn't have accurately described SNK, its origin or IP. SNK was becoming so entrenched in American culture, its games were starting to feel as American as apple pie and Chrysler. The company that had been made famous by Atari and had seen Tradewest artwork adorn its arcade cabinets wanted its identity back; the SNK team wanted gamers to know who they were and where they were from. Over the following decade it would be this same desire that would hold SNK back and prevent them from ever becoming a true world force. More of that later, though.

Victory Road the sequel to *Ikari Warriors* was released late in 1986, this time only on a JAMMA board; a popular sequel, it garnered a huge fan base and a bidding war ensued again. Data East would publish for the US CBM 64 only, under its auspice of Quicksilver, while the NES versions were handed to Takahito Yasuki's Romstar. Primarily a distribution company, it had recently incorporated Micronics. Kawasaki knew Yasuki from his time at Taito; they shared a love of hardware and it was Yasuki that had recommended the use of Taito boards to kick-start SNK's development. Jacobs too had imminent respect for Yasuki, siting him as, "the only competitor I feared at Universal." Theirs was now an easy alliance.

In 1987 *Athena*, *Alpha Mission* and *Ikari Warriors* all received their NES debuts; each title was a runaway smash hit, dominating sales charts across the world. Another two *Ikari* games would follow, each with similar success. SNK carried on its arcade business as usual, while Romstar converted the latest titles to the NES.

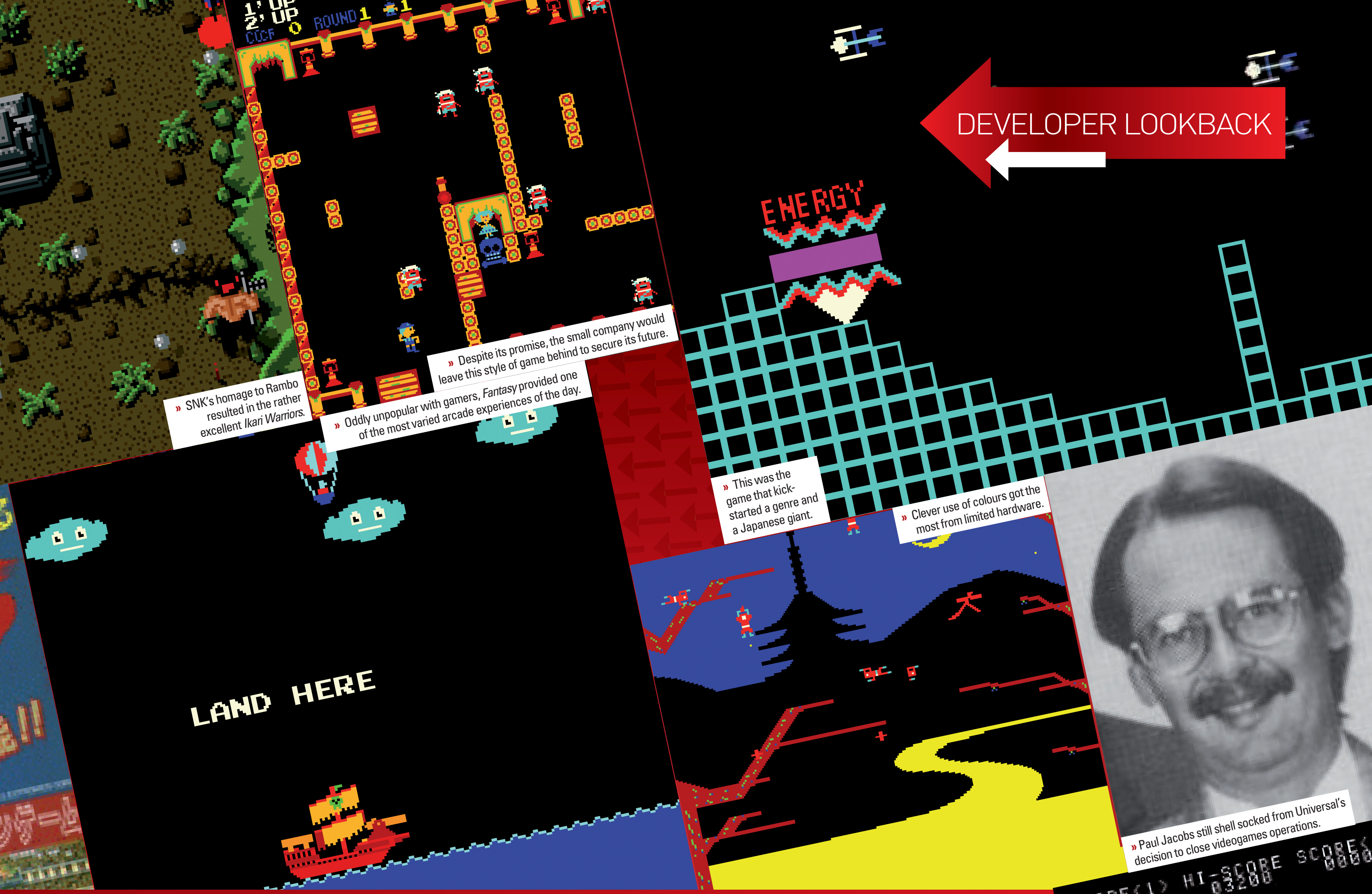
By the end of '87 *Ikari Warriors* had been converted to ten formats, and still hadn't received a European release; while this may have frustrated other companies, SNK viewed this as a way of prolonging the shelf life of a product. The home market was far removed from the arcade business SNK had cut its teeth on where a game could burn brightly for six months, and burn out in seven.

Kawasaki knew that the NES, despite being a runaway success in the US and Japan, was having a much tougher time in Europe. Such was his belief in the hardware, he had countered this in a shrewd licensing agreement with Elite that stated that they could only develop games for computers, not consoles, so when the user base was sufficient, SNK would release the game through Romstar to Europe.

Kawasaki and Jacobs saw conversions as the way forward, and not just for home formats. They understood the arcade business too; SNK had significantly reduced costs with *Ikari 2*

SNK AND CAPCOM KISSING IN A TREE

SNK and Capcom have been regarded as bedfellows since the early Nineties, but their output was much more similar in the Eighties: SNK released *Alpha Mission* to be followed some months later by *1942*, Capcom released *Commando* to be followed by *Time Soldier*. This wasn't plagiarism, however; both SNK and Capcom had massive respect for each other. Kawasaki tells us that, "We have a very good business relationship with Capcom. Some employees often go to dinner or drink together. Almost all of the Japanese Game manufacturers HQs are located in Tokyo, but SNK & Capcom HQ are located in Osaka." The local rivalries of both companies pushed Japanese gaming forward. The Nineties were shaping up to be a real Golden era.



» SNK's homage to Rambo resulted in the rather excellent *Ikari Warriors*.

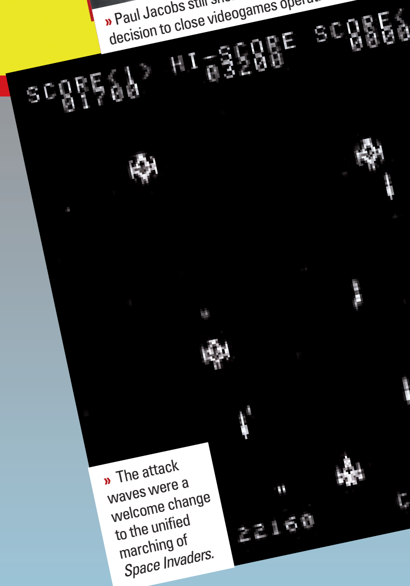
» Despite its promise, the small company would leave this style of game behind to secure its future.

» Oddly unpopular with gamers, *Fantasy* provided one of the most varied arcade experiences of the day.

» This was the game that kick-started a genre and a Japanese giant.

» Clever use of colours got the most from limited hardware.

» Paul Jacobs still shell socked from Universal's decision to close videogames operations.



» The attack waves were a welcome change to the unified marching of *Space Invaders*.

and operators loved it. Now there was an opportunity to make Universal's failed Multi Game system ideal a reality.

The MVS system was developed throughout 1988; while the hardware division worked on prototype designs, game output slowed, in readiness. During the downtime a select group of programmers, including Keiko Ijo, would work on two NES specific videogames, while helping out with the four launch games for MVS.

In 1989, *Baseball Stars* was released on the NES. Baseball was almost becoming Japan's national sport at the time, and already dominated American lives. It wasn't a straightforward baseball game either; rich in the nuances of the game, it also featured team management and rosters – a first for an action-led sports title – and its success was assured. The second game, that languished in development much longer than SNK was used to a at that point, was *Crystalis* (*God Slayer* in Japan). Almost two years in development, it didn't arrive until early 1990; it had the distinction of upsetting Nintendo and wowing all that played it. For one of the few times in its history, Nintendo was upstaged on its own console. Similar in many ways to Nintendo's *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Crystalis* was adult-themed and dark, containing inspired cut-scenes and a massive game world. *Crystalis* became so potent that Nintendo started to re-advertise *Zelda* in some areas to relight sales, damaging the poignancy and financial potential of what was and still is the better game.

More significantly for SNK though, 1989 would see the release of the Multi Video System. An arcade cabinet that could hold between one and six arcade games. The games would be stored in cartridge format, and swapped by the arcade operator in much the same way as a modern console works. Neal Zook, who at the time was SNK's resident designer, had created the cabinet to be changeable, so in the event of a new game being applied, the arcade operator could switch the tiles and artwork of the cabinet in a matter of minutes to create the effect of a standalone cabinet. It cost less than half the price of a traditional cabinet and games could be bought for less than half that price again. Arcade owners loved it and so did the gamers; the first four releases *Magician Lord*, *Nam 75*, *Baseball Stars Professional* and *Top Players Golf* all offered the videogaming pinnacle of their relative genres. With unrivalled processing power, and dedicated chips for sprites, scaling and sound, the MVS was a potent force.

A meeting between Kawasaki and Jacobs in mid-'89 would see SNK evolve again. As the decade of SNK's unbridled success drew to a close, Sega released the Genesis (purportedly to be the Sega arcade experience at home), Hudson and NEC finally released the oft delayed Turbo Grafx-16, and Nintendo had announced that the SNES would replace the rapidly aging NES.

For SNK to support any one machine exclusively would make little sense at this point; focus would for now return once again to the arcade, where SNK was the hardware king – Takara and Romstar could worry about the home conversions. Kawasaki and Jacobs had other plans…

Next month: The second part of out SNK trilogy continues.

Thanks to the lovely Killer List of Videogames for several images.

CRYSTALIS HAD THE DISTINCTION OF UPSETTING NINTENDO AND WOWING ALL THAT PLAYED IT

THE MAKING OF...

BARBARIAN AND BARBARIAN II



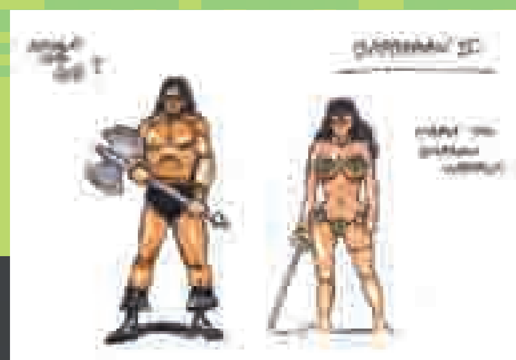
During a time when the most popular beat-'em-ups were good-natured, honourable karate games, Barbarian grabbed the headlines, offering gore, decapitated heads flying through the air and a suitably controversial advertising campaign. Designer Steve Brown grabs an axe and chats to Craig Grannell about Palace's classic brawler and its audience-polarising sequel.



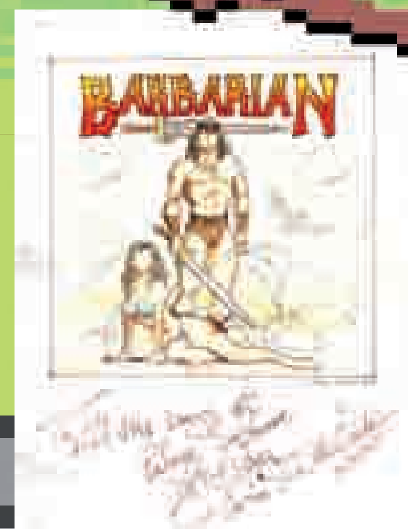
"I LOVED BRINGING TO LIFE THE VARIOUS FIGHTING MOVES AND MONSTERS – AND, OF COURSE, TAKING MOULDS OF MARIA WHITTAKER, SO THAT I COULD SCULPT AND CAST HER CUSTOM BREAST PLATES…" STEVE BROWN



» Some early concept art from *Barbarian II.*



» Hello Palace. Princess Leia wants her gold bikini back.



» There seemed to be little point in finishing off Whittaker's face. After all, no one was going to be looking at it…



» The *Barbarian* version of Match of the Day was somewhat lacking in tact.



» Steve on then unknown bodybuilder Michael Van Wijk: "He was a sweet guy and had very short hair. I worked hard to make him look ferocious – these shots got him the *Gladiators* gig, and the scowl/long hair became his trademark."

In the mid Eighties, fighting games were generally honourable fare. The rather forced gore of *Mortal Kombat* was over half a decade away, and small-screen gamers were still reeling from Melbourne House's *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, with its realistic graphics and crunching gameplay. But at Palace, Steve Brown was planning to turn the genre on its head, forming a blueprint for games that followed and considerably upping the ante regarding on-screen violence on home computers. "After working on the two *Cauldron* games, I was a bit fed up with tiny on-screen characters. I wanted to come up with something meaty – the sort of game that I wanted to play, but that no one had done yet," recalls Steve. "I was a big fan of the *Conan* novels, particularly the *Savage Sword Of Conan* comic magazines, which were full of hacking and slaying! I'd enjoyed *Exploding Fist*, and thought it'd be great to work on the ultimate sword-fighting game."

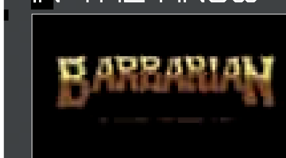
Along with feeding into Steve's personal tastes, *Barbarian* also met with Palace Software's approval. Although beat-'em-ups were fast becoming commonplace – even old hat – *Barbarian* was a new twist on the genre, rather than more of the same, and Palace Software was always keen to work on something that hadn't been done before.

SWORD AND SORCERY

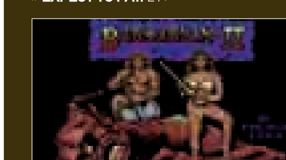
Coming up with a plot to hang the game from came easily to Steve. It centres around the evil sorcerer Drax, who swore to wreak doom on the people of the jewelled city unless Princess Mariana was delivered to him. His sole caveat: she will be freed if a champion can be found who's able to defeat Drax's guardians. All is lost until an unknown warrior appears from the forgotten wastelands of the north… It's all pretty cheesy and clichéd, but, as Steve says, that's part of the game's charm. "The story is just your basic sword and sorcery riff: take a princess, an evil wizard, a disgusting henchman, and so on, and the same is true of the character design – it's all very *Conan*esque."

However, Conan media did more than inform the game's backstory and look – it also directly influenced the most important aspect of *Barbarian*: the combat moves. "Being a big *Conan* fan, I had a pretty good idea of which sword-fighting moves would be cool in a game," says Steve. Wanting the gameplay to look and feel as realistic as

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
» **RELEASED:** 1987-9
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP/ARCADE ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CAULDRON
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

RIMRUNNER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, C64
YEAR: 1988

THE MAKING OF…

BARBARIAN



» Steve having a bit of fun on *Barbarian's* photoshoot with Mario Whittaker and Michael Van Wijk.



» Taking a cue from Mary Whitehouse, the monochrome barbarians decided to renounce violence and just hold hands.





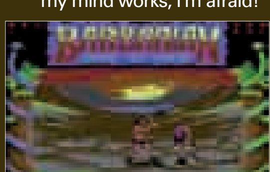
» The barbarian's kneecapping technique was nasty enough to make a hardened East End gangster shudder.



» You know a team's dedicated to its cause when even otherwise monochrome graphics have a gore injection!

OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

If there's one thing that's remained in people's minds about *Barbarian*, it's the flying neck chop – when your timing is spot-on, your barbarian spins through the air, his sword bringing a swift end to the current bout as it separates his opponent's head from his neck. "I desperately wanted a killer decapitation move in the game, and leaping through the air seemed to fit the bill," explains Steve. But what of the green goblin that shuffles on screen to unceremoniously boot the head out of sight, before dragging the headless corpse away? "Once we'd added the head-chop move, I felt it was a bit of a let-down for the head to just disappear before the next fight," recalls Steve. "Then it suddenly came to me – I thought it would be hysterically funny if a little green orc came along and booted the head away. That's just the way my mind works, I'm afraid!"



possible, Steve asked his girlfriend's father to fashion some wooden swords. Steve then roped in assistant animator Gary Carr, and the pair of them started practising like crazy in front of a video camera until they got the moves right: "We both got pretty banged up, but we actually learned how to do everything that Schwarzenegger did in the movie, including the 'web of death', where the sword is twirled behind the barbarian's back!" In addition to this great-looking attack, standard 'swiping' moves are on offer, along with a powerful overhead chop. In a nod to *Exploding Fist*'s success in combining offence and defence, several blocking moves were also integrated, adding a layer of strategy to the proceedings, rather than each battle deteriorating into a free-for-all hack-fest. However, perhaps the best inclusion – and certainly the most memorable – is *Barbarian*'s flying neck chop (see 'Off with his head!'), a move that made the devastation felt upon mastering *Exploding Fist*'s flying kick seem weedy and tame by comparison.

With the moves decided on and plenty of reference material now available – albeit reference of designers jumping around, fighting with wooden swords, rather than actual barbarians doing their thing – Steve got to work tracing key poses and using them as the basis for the barbarian's animation frames on the computer. For Steve, this process was one of the real highlights of working on *Barbarian*: "I've so many good memories of working on that game, but the best were learning the sword-fighting moves with Gary and then seeing them come to life in the game – that was magic!" However, like any good fighting game, just having a selection of interesting moves isn't enough – as with Melbourne House's *Exploding Fist*, it was essential that *Barbarian*'s control method be intuitive, rather than forcing gamers to regularly consult the manual; therefore, great care was taken when deciding on each move's position on the joystick. Without the fire button being pressed, the barbarian has defensive moves at his disposal (jump, crouch, roll, and two blocking positions with the sword, to protect his head and body); with the fire button used, six offensive sword attacks are on offer, along with two close-combat body moves – a kick and a meaty head-butt.

> "I'VE SO MANY GOOD MEMORIES OF WORKING ON BARBARIAN, BUT THE BEST WERE LEARNING THE SWORD-FIGHTING MOVES AND THEN SEEING THEM COME TO LIFE IN THE GAME – THAT WAS MAGIC!"
> STEVE BROWN

SOLO SWORDPLAY

"Next, we got the collision detection up and running," says Steve. "This enabled us to test the game in two-player mode to make sure it all worked and – most importantly – that it was fun." The main challenge to the team from that point on was in coming up with a system of responses for the computer opponent



» By being able to chop off heads on his own, the orc's productivity increased 100%



» Step-by-step drawings of one of Barbarian II's many gory death sequences. Note the black humour in the bottom two sketches.



» *Come Dancing*'s 'camp neanderthal and barbarian disco dancing' heat turned out to be a real rating's winner.



that, in Steve's words, "didn't suck and that wasn't totally predictable". With the majority of games in the genre falling foul to the 'unbeatable move syndrome', this level of unpredictability was of paramount importance, in order to give the game longevity and challenge. In practice, it works well, and even low-level opponents often have tricks up their sleeves to dispatch complacent or over-confident adversaries.

With the game's AI working, *Barbarian*'s 'combat practice' mode was complete, providing a two-player challenge and a means for solo players to hone their skills before taking on the game's single-player quest. This involves venturing deep into Drax's stronghold, taking on his guardians, each one more ruthless than the last, while he and the princess look on. The challenge ends with the barbarian taking on Drax himself, the sorcerer spewing magic from his fingers. Your timing has to be spot on for you to escape death and rescue the princess from his clutches.

To complete the production, the now sadly departed musical maestro Richard Joseph was drafted in and given the task of composing a suitably epic score for what was fast becoming a filmic 8-bit experience. "Richard, as always, did a fantastic job," remembers Steve. "As a starting point, we sat down and I played him two movies that I thought had the right feel: a fab old film from 1963 about Mayans fighting native American Indians, *Kings Of The Sun*. The film had a great rhythmic battle soundtrack that had always stuck in my head. We also, of course, watched *Conan The Barbarian*! Richard then went away, worked his magic, and returned with music and effects that were spot-on!"

Aside from the usual bunch of do-gooder whiners (see 'A wolf in no clothing'), *Barbarian* met with an enthusiastic response from most, and many gamers were excited about seeing a company doing something different, rather than releasing yet another game of people wearing pyjamas and kicking each other in the face. "Yeah! All the thrills and spills of a nightmarish abattoir – blood spurts, decapitated heads flying around, guts and gore and hunchback cripples dragging away corpses – this is what I call a real hack-'em-up," enthused Julian Rignall, in *Zzap!64*'s July 1987 issue, where the game narrowly missed a Sizzler! award. *Commodore User* was a little more generous, with Eugene Lacey noting: "Although it's a bit sick, it has to be said *Barbarian* is a real winner," and duly awarding the game a Screen Star. Elsewhere, a *C+VG* Hit softened the blow from the game narrowly failing to Smash in *Crash*, and a year later, the Amiga version, complete with smoother animation, faster gameplay and some neat sampled sound effects, had Gary Penn positively frothing at the mouth in the Amiga section of *Commodore User*. None of this acclaim stunned Palace at the time, though. "I don't mean to sound big-headed, but I knew *Barbarian* was a good game, and I wasn't surprised that it did very well," claims Steve. "I've always had very good commercial instincts, and I made the game that I wanted to play. The cover art and gore were totally in keeping with the concept and all part of the fun. It's exactly what I would have wanted as a punter!"

THE DUNGEONS OF DRAX

With *Barbarian* having struck a chord with weary gamers, creating a sequel was a no-brainer, but as with previous Palace sequels, it was important to differentiate it from the first game. "I hate repeating ideas," says Steve. "Therefore, the challenge for us was to add features to the game and take it in a new direction." Steve started thinking about answers to the question 'How do you expand from two guys fighting each-other in an arena?', arriving at two separate conclusions: "The first answer that came to me was that we could have the barbarian move around a larger playing area; secondly, I thought we could add fantasy monsters. In the end, as was usually the case when I worked on games, I decided to go for both!"

A WOLF IN NO CLOTHING

The keen-eyed among you will spot Michael Van Wijk (*Gladiators*' Wolf) on *Barbarian*'s cover. Despite his lack of clothes, it was Maria Whittaker's Princess Mariana that courted most controversy, causing outrage at her skimpy outfit. "I'd conceived the cover imagery and undiluted violence right from the beginning as part of the whole experience," admits Steve. "I think people were blown away by the game and the publicity in equal measure." However, he does recall the game being banned for a time in Germany, and WHSmith showing its prudish side: "We had to come up with an alternative cover for *Barbarian II*, otherwise they wouldn't stock it!"



THE MAKING OF… BARBARIAN



» Sanding opposite a barbarian with a very sharp axe, the evil Drax wished his magic's range was a little further than six inches.

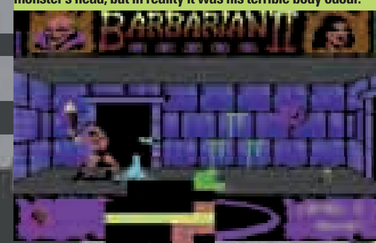


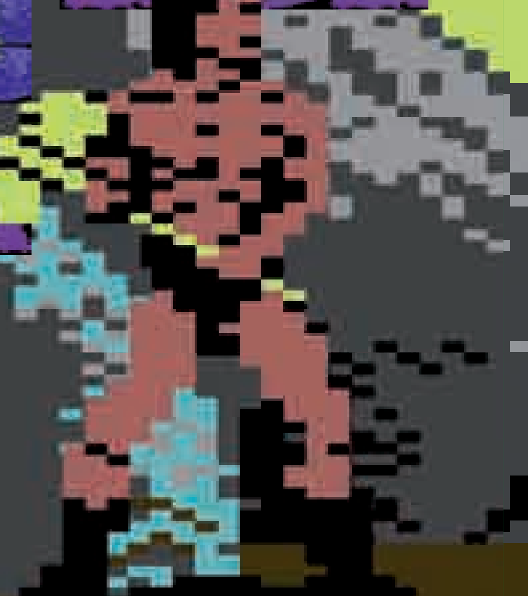
» Sadly, our hero ignored entry #671 of the Barbarian Handbook: never let a nasty green thing with a sword sneak up behind you.



» "I knew I should have emigrated with the princess," thought our hero during his swift, cowardly retreat from a tiny foe.

» Our hero liked to think his axe prowess removed the monster's head, but in reality it was his terrible body odour.





GIRL POWER

With Princess Mariana reduced to the role of eye-candy-come-captive in *Barbarian*, it's only fair that her role was expanded in the sequel. Following in the brave footsteps of the girl from *Ant Attack* and the similarly unnamed female ranger in *Park Patrol*, Mariana struck a blow for women's rights everywhere, proving she was just as capable as her male counterpart (in that she, too, could run around nearly naked and hack various monsters to bits). With numerous tiresome activists engrossed in complaining about the cover art, this little slice of gaming equality was lost to many. Still, some preferred playing as the princess – "We added the feature to accommodate gamers who wanted to get in touch with their feminine side," jokes Steve – even though it made no difference in gameplay terms, despite what some long-time fans seem to think.



And so *Barbarian II: The Dungeons of Drax* slowly came into being, following the adventures of the barbarian and Princess Mariana on their quest to rid the jewelled city once and for all of Drax's evil. Smarting from his earlier defeat, the sorcerer has fled to the safety of his castle's dungeons and vowed revenge. Playing either as the barbarian or Princess Mariana, the player must battle through three levels of increasing difficulty before facing off against two massive foes and Drax himself in the inner sanctum.

In terms of basic gameplay, the most obvious change is *Barbarian II*'s move away from linear progression. The original *Barbarian*'s quest has you moving ever onward in a straight line, but the sequel's levels are maze-like, with a compass pointing north, helping you keep track of your bearings. "It was really hard to figure out how to move around a 3D map in a 2D side-on game, and in the end there was only one workable solution, but it wasn't very elegant," admits Steve. "Another big limitation for me was in not being able to have a scrolling background – the screen-flipping spoiled the game for me."

IT'S A FUNNY OLD DEATH

Despite this set-back – and anyone who's played *Barbarian II* will be pretty aware of the confusing nature of the compass, seeing as you might exit a screen on the left only to end up running right, but with the compass having turned 180 degrees – it's safe to say that the sheer variety of enemies lurking in the levels somewhat made up for it. And where there are enemies, there's scope for death gags, and Steve certainly expanded on the original *Barbarian*'s flying neck chop. In the wastelands, a sauron beast will happily bite the head off of a sluggish barbarian, enabling you to watch a head-sized lump travel down its narrow neck when it swallows, after which the beast emits a satisfied belch; in the caverns, carnivores pounce and grab unprepared barbarians, shaking them like rag dolls; and in the dungeons, the dungeon master's heart can be torn from his chest with a well-timed flying neck chop (he's rather on the tall side, see?), while a pit thing grabbing a hapless hero results in your helpless avatar being dragged downwards, eaten (complete with suitably meaty crunching noises) and a skull being spat out of the pit. "I don't know where all these ideas come from – they just pop into my head," says Steve. "The main thing is that if they make me laugh or have the 'wow' factor, I'll use them, otherwise they go in the bin. Certainly, black humour keeps things interesting, and so I wanted to push that in the sequel – the more body parts I could slice off, the better!" But after the gore of the previous effort, were the team concerned about reaction from the censors? "Well, as there were so many things in the game that could bleed, we did tone down the 'vibrancy' of the blood, to avoid problems with the more squeamish distributors," Steve admits.

It's safe to say that the scope and ambition of *Barbarian II* were both high, but the result met with a mixed reaction, not least due to the far more limited moves on offer – just four, compared to the original's eight, and there were no available defensive moves at all. "With all of the extra animation featured in the game – running, falling into pits, the monsters, and so on – there just wasn't room for the frames," explains Steve, adding that some of the original moves had to go to make room for the 'run' and 'through door' actions. Nonetheless, despite the subdued reaction from some (*Your Sinclair*'s "Slobbery follow-up to everybody's fave slash-'n'-drool game of '87" probably being the low point), *Zzap!64* still managed to get terribly excited about the game, awarding it a Gold Medal, and *Commodore User* later awarded the Amiga game a Screen Star, despite it being "undeniably 8-bit". Steve is unapologetic to the game's detractors, although he admits *Barbarian II* is not without its flaws: "The second game was a bold step in a new direction, and it was entertaining on many levels, but it didn't have the classic perfection of the first game." Once again he

» After years of working in a miserable dungeon, the keeper's heart just wasn't in it any more.



» "Pick a card, any card," said the demon, but our hero wasn't fooled. After all, there weren't any cards.



managed to have fun, though, even if his over-riding memories about the game aren't always to do with its design: "I loved bringing to life the various fighting moves and monsters – and, of course, taking moulds of Maria Whittaker, so that I could sculpt and cast her custom breast plates…"

THE FINAL CONFLICT

As seasoned fans of the game will know, the end of *Barbarian II* finds the barbarian's quest seemingly at an end when he removes Drax's head from its usual position on his shoulders.

However, before our hero has a chance to rearrange his furry pants, Drax sneakily collects his bonce, replaces it and sneaks off through a portal. When the barbarian tries to follow, he is repelled, and the last we see of Drax is his fist returning to offer our hero a rather rude hand gesture. "About two-thirds of the way through *Barbarian II*, I had the incredibly 'original' idea that the series could be a trilogy," explains Steve, referring to the cliffhanger ending. "Therefore, I pulled the climactic Drax death sequence I'd planned – Drax's skin originally split apart to reveal another monster for the barbarian to fight – and let him escape through his magic mirror."

With *Barbarian II* safely in the can, Steve approached Palace's Pete Stone with a pitch for *Barbarian III: The Final Conflict*. The storyline had the barbarian and Princess Mariana tracking Drax to his final retreat, the throne room of his castle. Prior to this, there were to be three levels of weird and wonderful monsters, plentiful new traps, and new gameplay elements. "When the fourth level was reached, Drax would summon all the powers of hell and change into a huge, gross, tentacled 'penis monster'," explains Steve. "Only a skilled player who'd gone through the game successfully to this point could avoid getting eaten alive, and if Drax was defeated, the player would have been treated to an animation of the barbarian and Princess Mariana standing astride the vanquished monster, their hearts joyful, their loins ablaze with desire!"

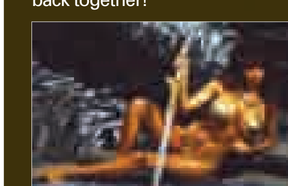
The game was to be a combination of what Steve considered the best gameplay elements from the first two outings, but taken to new heights of black humour and animation excellence. "For example, the arcade adventure sections, although similar to *Barbarian II*, would have featured scrolling backgrounds," says Steve. Most exciting, though, were Steve's plans for combat sequences at key stages. "I wanted these to be similar to the original *Barbarian*, but with much larger figures – think *Tekken* in 2D, with swords and knives!"

Plenty of initial designs were created, along with some test animations and a sculpture of the 'penis monster'. "I also had some initial meetings with the effects shop at Pinewood Studios, to discuss having a 15-foot-long tentacle made to lift the princess into the air for a cover shoot," says Steve, noting that this was in the days before Photoshop and CGI. Unfortunately, before his plans could evolve any further, Palace folded and he never heard anything more about the project. "Shame," concludes Steve, "because it would have kicked serious arse!"

> "BLACK HUMOUR KEEPS THINGS INTERESTING, AND SO I WANTED TO PUSH THAT IN THE SEQUEL – THE MORE BODY PARTS I COULD SLICE OFF, THE BETTER!"

COSTUME TROUBLES

While many making ofs include harrowing tales of all-night debugging sessions, Steve recalls that he, as the designer, had, erm, 'pressing' concerns elsewhere. "For Barbarian 2's cover, I wanted to top the first game's costumes, and so I got Maria Whittaker in for a costume fitting," he remembers. "After she tried on some bikini-type tops, it occurred to me to sculpt some gold breast-plates, like those in exotic Frank Frazetta paintings. All I could find to make an impression of her size and shape to take home were some foil ashtrays—there were worse ways to spend an afternoon!" However, despite Steve's efforts, the flimsy chains holding Maria's plates would snap if she took a big breath. "It was like a Carry On movie," says Steve. "I spent plenty of time with pliers, bending the links back together!"



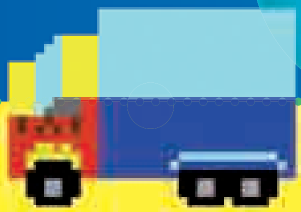
The Definitive

FROGGER

STUART CAMPBELL ALSO DROWNS IF HE FALLS INTO WATER (ASK THE CREW OF HMS OCELOT), SO WHO BETTER COULD THERE BE TO GUIDE US THROUGH THE WORLD OF MYSTERIOUSLY INCAPABLE AMPHIBIANS?

It's kind of amazing, if you think about how many tens of thousands of videogames there have been, to realise just how few have ever existed that you can play with only one hand (you can make up your own *Sam Fox Strip Poker* joke at this point, if you like). Indeed, ask the average gamer in the street and he'd have a pretty hard time coming up with a single one between *Pac-Man* in 1980 (and its first few sequels) and *Super Monkey Ball*, released over 20 years later. Ask the slightly (above) average gamer, though, and he'll probably hit you straight away with *Frogger*. The annoying smartarse.

From such simple uni-dextrous beginnings, though, *Frogger* has not only gradually evolved into a convoluted franchise encompassing several very different types of game, but the branches of its family tree most directly derived from the coin-op original are now also ironically among the most complicated arcade-style games you can play, with controls that you could do with a third or fourth hand to operate smoothly. How has such a situation come to pass? Really, the only sensible way to explain it would be if someone could somehow take you on a trip through the entire chronology of the series, looking at every single one of the 22 distinct and separate *Frogger* games and analysing the way the franchise has broken up into at least three identifiable factions, all pursuing their own goals across a variety of formats for very different audiences. Unfortunately, there's nobody in the world with that sort of dedication to the cause of clarifying the tangled histories of classic videogames, so sadly it will never be possible to – what's that? There IS? And they happen to be passing by at this very moment? Quick, grab them!





1981
FROGGER (ARCADE)

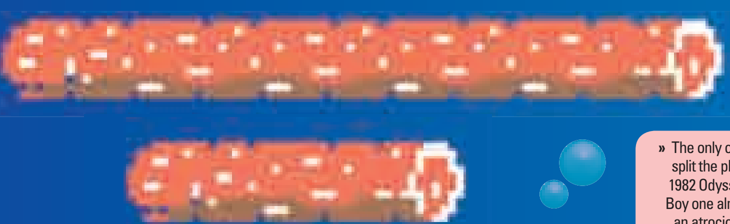
The single screen, block-based movement and basic controls make *Frogger* one of the simplest and most ubiquitous videogames of all time. The format hasn't been made that couldn't host an acceptable version of it, and there have been over 20 official licensed ports as well as countless hundreds of knock-off clones. In fact, some formats even got more than one – the official Atari VCS version was a crude-looking effort, but the bizarre Supercharger cassette-tape peripheral for the console also had an official *Frogger* (Parker Brothers, makers of the cart game, had understandably only thought to buy the solid-state media rights) made for it, which was hugely superior.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The original arcade game is included as a bonus feature in *Ancient Shadow* (according to the box, anyway – I've never found it), and is also available, complete with a very pretty enhanced version, on Xbox Live Arcade. But for maximum fun you should play it in MAME. If you use the emulator's built-in cheat function and play with infinite time, you can actually listen to the background tune all the way to the end – normally you get barely halfway through it before the time limit runs out and you die.

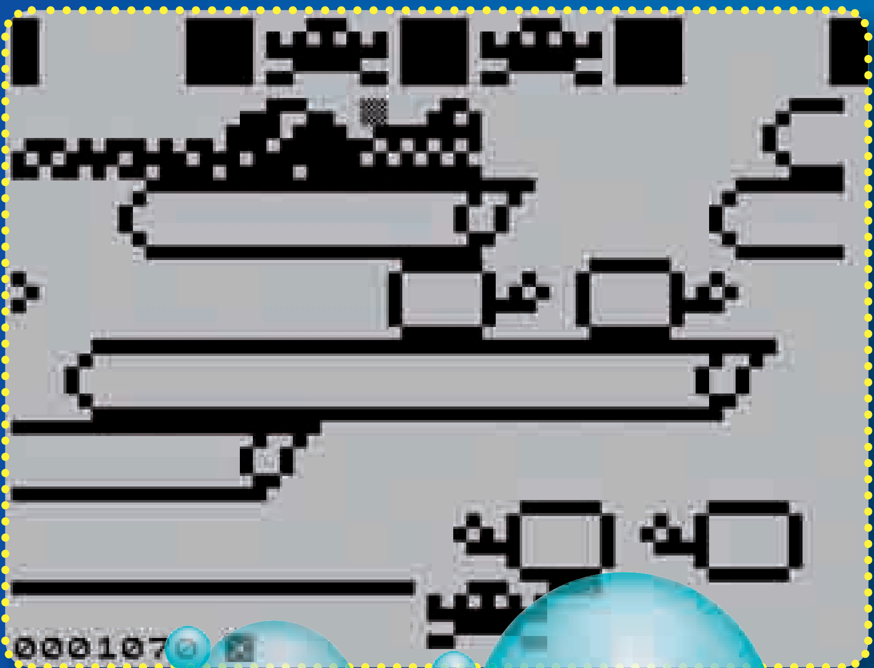


» The enhanced mode of the 360 game comes off better than almost all of the other arcade classics that have been resprayed for XBLA, so it's well worth a screenshot.





» The only other official versions to split the playfield in two were the 1982 Odyssey2 release, the Game Boy one almost 20 years later, and an atrocious recent Java port for mobile phones.



1981
FROGGER (ZX81)

There are so many landmarks attached to this port that it deserves a separate mention. For a start, if this isn't the first ever officially licensed arcade-to-home-computer conversion, I can't think of what would beat it. And it certainly must at the very least be the quickest one of its era, unprecedentedly coming out within months of its coin-op parent at a time when you usually had to wait four or five years to have a chance of seeing an arcade hit on a home micro. It's also, to my knowledge, the only officially licensed game of any kind ever to appear on the ZX81. This is a very impressive piece of software for the primitive Sinclair machine, splitting the arcade playfield into two separate screens, with the second one boasting huge pseudo-3D graphics including a monstrous crocodile half the width of the screen. All the coin-op features are there, from crocs to flies to lady frogs and diving turtles, and it whips along at a pace that ought to have been well beyond the Neanderthal hardware.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The decent ZX81 emulator VB81.

The Definitive FROGGER



» The only goal in Stage two is to get a single frog on the dinghy being towed behind the boat.



» There are actually over 50 levels, of which this one is thematically the closest to the first Frogger.



1984
FROGGER 2: THREEDEEP (COLECOVISION)

The first follow-up to *Frogger* was a game so confusing and messed-up that even after more than 20 years it's impossible to figure out what in God's name was going through the minds of its designers (though it's pretty easy to deduce what was going through their bloodstream). Ever since the release of the first game and throughout its subsequent history, commentators everywhere have delighted in pointing out how zany it is that if you fall in water in *Frogger* you die, despite frogs being AMPHIBIANS and therefore perfectly happy to spend much of their lives in the water. Ker-razy! Well, in *Frogger 2: Threedeep* that little oversight gets corrected. At least it does on Stage one, where our slimy-skinned star is able to scoot around in the water of a river without a care in the world, dodging alligators and large fish which are deadly to the touch, but apparently able to jump around on smaller fish, which he merely can't stand still on. On Stage two, on the other hand, the water is deadly again (what?) and instead of having to avoid alligators you have to jump on their backs (what?) and if you touch a mother duck it carries you off to another stage set in the sky (WHAT?) unless you're sitting on one of its babies, in which case it kills you. Obviously.

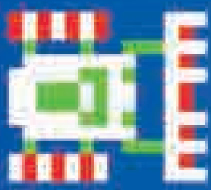
Threedeep is a horribly vague game, not only in the unfathomability of where you're supposed to be going but also in the schizophrenic mix of pixel movement and block movement, whereby sometimes you can jump between adjacent lily pads and sometimes you fall in-between them and drown, depending on which split-second you jumped onto them from a log. What Frogger's doing in the sky on Stage three is anyone's guess, as is the identity of the indeterminate flapping things that make holes appear in the clouds below him when he touches them. Weird, but not at all wonderful.

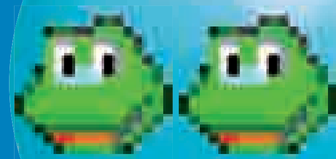
PLAY IT NOW ON: The misleadingly named Coleco emu BlueMSX gets the job done. *Threedeep* was also adequately converted to many other formats, including the C64 and Atari VCS and 5200.

1991
RIBBIT! (ARCADE)

Sega marked the tenth anniversary of the first *Frogger* with a game which, although it doesn't actually bear the *Frogger* name anywhere, is a sequel in every other sense (and the only one to ever appear in arcades). The one-stick, no-buttons control method is straight from the original, as is the core gameplay, except this time it's focused on the bonus flies you used to collect when jumping into one of the frog homes. Here you chase them all over the screen, but the obstacles are basically the same – spiders patrol sideways across the screen like the cars of the parent game, and there are still logs and swimming turtles to help you across rivers. It's fast moving (levels typically take less than 20 seconds), cute and a lot of fun, and a much more faithful sequel than many of the later ones that would actually carry on the family name.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME.





1991
FROGGER (PROTOTYPE) (GAME GEAR)

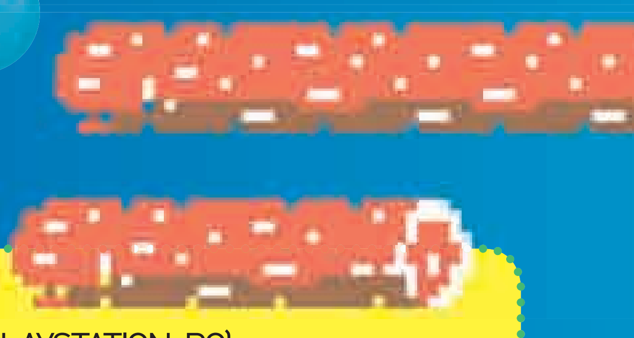
As alert readers will come to realise throughout the course of this feature, naming isn't the strong point of the Frogger series. This never-released prototype was the first of many games, which would simply go under the name '*Frogger*' while actually being entirely new sequels. This is a very sweet little game, comprised of levels each containing several sets of road and river crossings populated by a wide variety of inhabitants, ranging from swans, trams, elephants, Chinese New Year dragons, and even (alarmingly) tanks. In each level you have to go and collect three baby frogs and bring them back home – you can either rescue them one at a time, or try to save time by getting all three in one trip, but risk losing them all if you get killed. There are also fruits littered around which can provide bonus points or extra lives, tempting you into more trouble. It's simple, addictive, classic *Frogger*, and you always want to see what new weirdness is on the next level. This accomplished little game never saw a release due to Sega's rights to *Frogger* expiring, so be grateful you can finally enjoy it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The excellent multi-Sega emu Fusion certainly plays Frogger perfectly.

» There are bonus stages too. This isn't one of them, but it seemed as good a place as any to mention it.









» Of all the updated versions of original *Frogger*, the graphics in the PS1 game are my favourites.

1997
FROGGER (PLAYSTATION, PC)

In the mid-to-late 1990s, when you had to be a dumber than a drunk moose to fail to make money on PlayStation games, publishers were in hog heaven. Everyone and his dog (by which I mean Hasbro and Activision) was going ape crazy remaking classic arcade games, and often giving players kittens in the process. Lost among a shoal of lesser fish in a pool of big sharks like *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids* and *Defender*, this excellent update of *Frogger* didn't get the love it deserved at the time – in a fair world punters would have flocked to it like moths to a flame. The injustice of the situation could easily send a man a bit squirrelly, because this is a smashing little game, capturing the essence of the original as surely as a hawk swooping on a vole, and tearing it into loads of varied levels that are as small as a mouse, as wily as a fox and as mean as a snake. Ferociously hard and set against a tigerish time limit, half the challenge was simply finding out where everything in the level was in the 30 seconds or so before the timer slipped away from you like a greased eel – worrying about how to beat it was a whole other problem. A clever structure kept it addictive without being overly frustrating, too. It really is the bee's knees.

PLAY IT NOW ON: ePSXe runs this fairly well (the game itself is fine but some of the menus and cut-scenes are blank), but again, if you're wise enough to have a PSP with custom firmware, the game works excellently on the handheld, and like most PS1 games looks twice as good on the little screen as it ever did on a telly or a monitor.

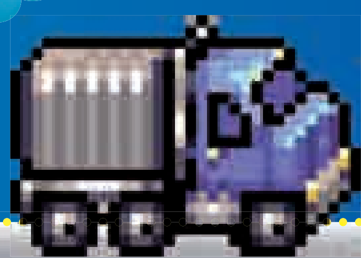
» A homebrew effort released for the SNES two years earlier had more effort spent on it than this official version.

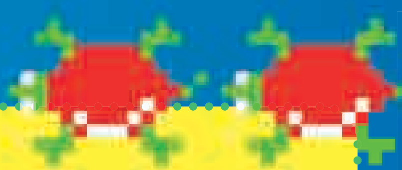


1998
FROGGER (SNES/GBC)

Frogger has the distinction of being the last ever official game release on not one, but two different consoles. The Mega Drive's curtain-closer, also released in 1998, is a straight, un-enhanced port of the 1981 coin-op (except that it forces you to have five lives instead of three) so we won't trouble with it here, but the SNES version is an entirely new remake. Very similar to the Game Boy Color version also developed by Majesco at the same time, the SNES game is a nasty hack job with primitive graphics, bad collision detection and no music at all, not even the traditional *Frogger* starting jingle that the GBC version managed (although at least, unlike the GBC game, the SNES frog wasn't twice the size of the cars). Presumably this sudden flurry of *Frogger* activity was born on the back of the PS1 remake, and it's an object lesson in just how cynical and cheap the videogames industry can be when it thinks nobody's looking.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The SNES emulator ZSNES.

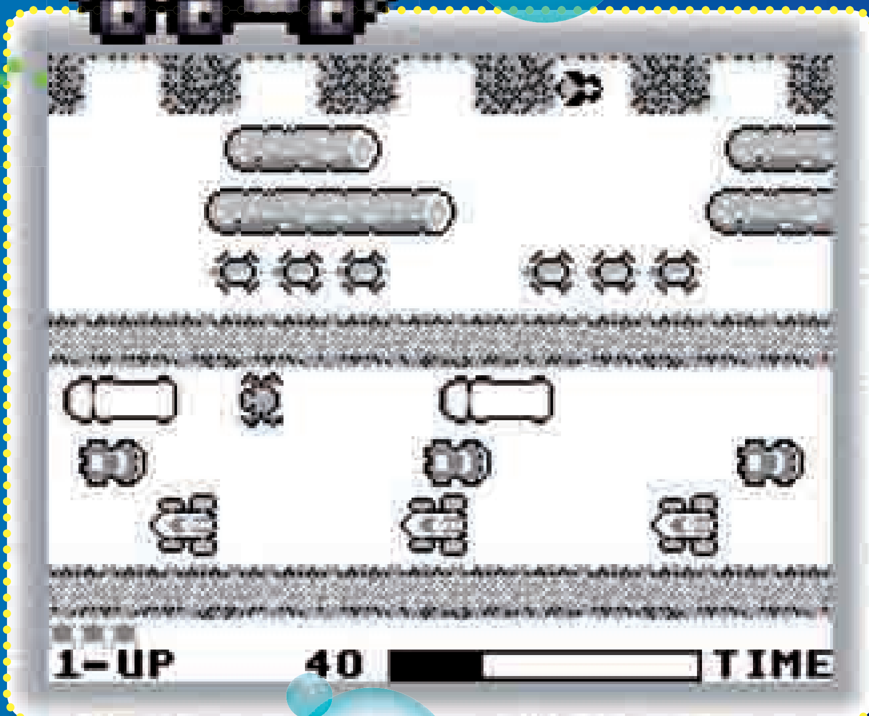




1999
FROGGER (GAME.COM)

Tiger's Game.com might have beaten the DS by six years to claim the rightful title of 'first touch screen handheld console' (and it boasted internet connectivity too), but it was a dreadful atrocity of a machine crippled by an incredibly blurry screen and a painfully slow CPU. Nevertheless, a few companies made games for it during its fruit fly of a lifespan (just 20 known titles were ever released), and Hasbro was by far its biggest supporter, knocking out versions of several of its best-known properties. The GCOM's *Frogger* contained a curious interpretation of the original game, with just three lanes each of road and river (instead of the proper five), and abruptly ended after 13 levels rather than continuing indefinitely like its predecessor. More noteworthy was the new remake version also found on the cart, which had enhanced graphics and interesting features like levels made up entirely of roadway or solely of river. It's not saying much to observe that it's one of the system's best games, but if you should come across the console for 50 pence in a car boot sale, make sure you get Frogger with it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: That boot sale is currently your only chance, as there's no publicly released GCOM emulator. The MESS team are working on a driver, and allegedly a native development emulator by Tiger was leaked several months ago, but the people who claim to have obtained it are enjoying crowing about it and touching each other's bottoms far too much to let anyone else play.



» In both the classic and updated versions you can choose to start on any of the 13 levels, making this screenshot of Level one something of a disappointment.

2000
FROGGER 2: SWAMPY'S REVENGE (PS1, PC, DREAMCAST)

While the first PlayStation *Frogger* was very much an arcade high-score game in the same tradition as the original, the sequel to the remake started to move down a different path. The main game in *Swampy's Revenge* was, while superficially similar, much more linear, with the player never in any doubt where they were supposed to go next thanks to a more zoomed-out viewpoint. There's no point scoring at all, and the twin aims of the game are to complete levels in record time, and to collect all the coins secreted around them. Getting every single coin in a stage unlocks the game's cutest feature – a series of short time-attack levels, which take the graphics from the original coin-op and depict them in a 3D style reminiscent of *Tron*, or for younger readers, *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions*.

The biggest problem with *Swampy's Revenge* is that there isn't much of it – with just 16 normal levels (most of which are only around two minutes long) and ten of the retro VR missions, you'll almost certainly clear it in a day, and once you've beaten the built-in times on each level there's little incentive to play again. But it's sweet while it lasts.



» There are also some fun multiplayer head-to-head games, several of which take place in the VR levels.



» There are only so many things you can think of to say about pictures of a frog on a road near a river, and I appear to have run out.

2000
FROGGER 2 (GAME BOY COLOR)

The naming fiasco continues with this – which is actually the third distinct game to carry the title *Frogger 2* – because despite being released at the same time and with the same box artwork, this is NOT *Swampy's Revenge* (the words have been cunningly airbrushed out of the box and label art, and don't appear anywhere on screen either). What you get here is pure original *Frogger*-type gameplay, in a style that sits somewhere between the PS1 remake and the unreleased Game Gear title. Pretty much the only thing it has in common with *Swampy's Revenge* is that each level can either be zipped through to beat the time record, or you can methodically explore to find and collect all the items – in this case score-boosting diamonds. Later levels introduce puzzle elements (the Ice Caves, for example, are sheet ice with only a few safe spots, that you have to slide between), but there's not too much thinking involved – this is straightforward arcade fun. Again, it's not vast and you'll almost certainly have worked through every level in a day, but at least with the high-score table there's always something to come back for.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

2001
FROGGER'S ADVENTURES: TEMPLE OF THE FROG (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

The following year's GBA debut saw *Frogger* take a bigger leap in the direction started by *Swampy's Revenge*, towards what would become the dominant form for games in the series. In essence a platform game despite the overhead-view perspective, you get five element-themed worlds (each broken up into stages) of precarious manoeuvring that's conceptually closest to something like *Manic Miner* (no, it's not the most immediately obvious comparison, but if you examine the gameplay that's what it is). It's extremely zippily-paced and it starts to get difficult pretty early on, but never in an unfair way – deaths are usually the result of panicking or rushing where a cool head and patience would have got you through safely, so you dive in again, but because you know what's coming you think you can race through this time and bam, you're squished again. If you'll forgive the mixed onomatopoeia. The addictive nature of the gameplay can once more probably see the whole thing polished off in a day, but if you're disciplined enough to do a stage or two at a time and then switch off, there's weeks of Frogging fun here. (The cart has four save slots, enabling you to go back to an earlier version if you want to build up a stockpile of lives for a particularly tricky stage or for your little sister to have a game at the same time.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

» The very first stage pays fulsome tribute to the classic *Frogger* themes.



The Definitive FROGGER

2002
KONAMI COLLECTOR'S SERIES: ARCADE CLASSICS (GBA)

This six-game compilation contains a fine selection of very well reproduced games (entirely wrecked by lack of high-score saving, but that's another issue), and the port of *Frogger* is extremely faithful, copying the coin-op graphics precisely – the screen scrolls vertically to fit everything in – though for some reason having entirely new music (not even the same new music that was in the Game Boy versions). Much more interesting, though, is that like the other games on the compilation, if you enter the famous Konami cheat code (Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A), you unlock a whole new version with greatly enhanced graphics and still more brand-new music.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



» See? Enhanced.



» Apparently turtles (and worms) can now breathe indefinitely under water too.

2002
FROGGER ADVANCE: THE GREAT QUEST (GBA)

Given that you read Retro Gamer, the chances are that you remember the SNES/Mega Drive era. If you do, you'll recall that it was a time of endless third-rate collect-'em-up platform games with oversized graphics and cutesy animal characters like Bubsy the Bobcat and Aero the Acro-Bat and Chester the Cheetah and Mortimer the Marmoset and Ian the Intestinal Parasite and God knows who else. Well, guess what? Those days are back, or at least they were in 2002 when Konami decided for no good reason at all that what the *Frogger* franchise really needed was a crap-awful 2D platform game where you trudged your way through endless levels of dull, slow identikit worlds picking up thousands and thousands and thousands of little coins to no great purpose until you died of general terribleness.

But wait! There's a twist! Remember how Frogger can't swim, except he sort of could in bits of *Frogger 2: Threedeep*, except everyone quietly pretends that never happened and isn't really part of the proper *Frogger* history? Well, get this – in *Frogger Advance: The Great Quest*, our hero swims like a goddamn dolphin. Levels are just chock-full of underwater caves through which the froggy little fella will glide and dive and plunge and frolic all day long without so much as having to come up for a breath. Man, sometimes I think we should just hand the videogames industry over to chimps in dungarees and flat caps and be done with it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

2002
FROGGER: THE GREAT QUEST (PC, PS2)

Despite sharing (almost) the same name, the PC and PS2 versions of *The Great Quest* could scarcely resemble the GBA game any less. Rather than side-on 2D platforming, what you get here is yet another entirely different type of game carrying the *Frogger* name, this time *Zelda*-ish RPG antics in a gloomy olive palette that's well suited to the unexciting nature of the gameplay. The only things this *Great Quest* shares with its handheld cousin are that they're the only games in the series with 'free' movement rather than the trademark grid-based leaping that characterises every other title in the line, and that Frogger still has the ability to swim. But enjoy the skill while you can, because it's the last you'll see of it – every subsequent game will see our heroic amphibian drown the instant he touches water again. Sigh.

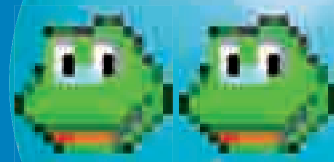
PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PC or PS2.

» If there's one thing you can say about *The Great Quest*, it's that it doesn't skimp on the green.





» For some reason you get one fewer save slot this time, so if you've got more than two little sisters you're a bit buggered.





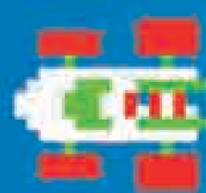
2002

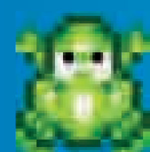
FROGGER'S ADVENTURES 2: THE LOST WAND (GBA)

Curiously, the only two languages you're offered at the start are American and Spanish, but otherwise this is cut from very much the same cloth as the quintilingual *Temple Of The Frog*, to the extent that it's really just a new set of levels for the same game – the only real step forward this time is that you get a bunch of simple multiplayer link-up games, three of them playable with a single cart and more for players who have a cart each, and also a Time Attack mode for levels you've completed (the only step backwards, on the other hand, is a long and hatefully unskippable intro cut-scene). Again it's all about getting into the rhythm of moving platforms and fixed-patrol monsters, again it's quick and fun and highly addictive, and again there isn't an especially vast amount of it, so before I have to say 'again' again, let's move on.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Like all the GBA *Frogger* games, *The Lost Wand* looks beautiful on the backlit screen of an imported SP or a GBA Micro, but I particularly advise playing this one via emulation, because when you've just died for the 46th time on the boss stage of the icy second level, it's a lot harder to hurl your PC out of the window in frustration.







2003

FROGGER'S ADVENTURES: THE RESCUE (PS2, PC, GAMECUBE)

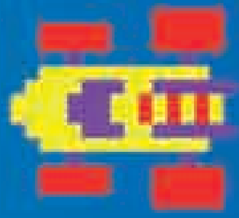
Among the many fixed-overhead-view grid-based *Frogger* games of recent years, although they all look broadly the same, there are two quite distinct types. The GBA *Frogger's Adventures* titles, for example, are in essence actually platform games. Your objectives are usually pretty clear and linear, and it's just a case of manipulating the controls deftly and swiftly enough to traverse the environment safely, often in situations where a single wrong step will see you crumped by an enemy or plunging to your death. But the second type, which includes games like *The Rescue*, are noticeably more thoughtful and puzzle-focused, with little in the way of pressing danger but a fair bit of head-scratching required if you're going to figure out the way to your goal. They're still unforgivingly structured, with an unpleasant tendency to send you back a very long way when you run out of lives, but at least here you can choose to give yourself a generous seven to start with to reduce the problem a bit. This is one of the more likeable of the later *Frogger*s, with slightly simpler controls (no vertical jump) and a difficulty level that's gently challenging rather than outright hostile.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PS2, PC or GameCube. Make sure you have a joypad if you choose the PC version, as the control method makes things very unpleasant if you're trying to play with the keyboard.

» The wrecking-ball puzzle immediately preceding this boss stage had me stumped for a good few minutes.



The Definitive FROGGER



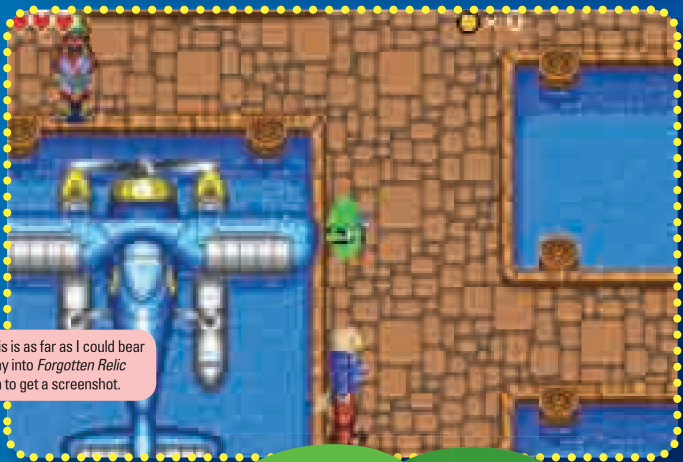
» Wow. A slippy-slidey ice world and a runaway-mine cart level – TOGETHER AT LAST!



2003
FROGGER BEYOND (PC, XBOX, GAMECUBE)

It's got a hip-hop theme song. Christ. *Frogger Beyond* takes a short step away from the fixed-view grids and back towards the gameplay design of the first PS1 *Frogger*, and is almost as viciously difficult, only without the saving grace of the levels being really small. You get a reasonably generous supply of lives, with extra ones scattered around, but if you do manage to run out before the end of a ten-minute level, it's all the way back to the start for you. While movement is still grid-based, the developers have tried to pep up the visuals by having things scroll around a bit in different directions and not look so much like a grid, which serves only to introduce confusion as you can't quite tell where things are or whether you can jump to them or not, leading to some unfair and annoying deaths. Such incidents are just rare enough not to ruin the game, though, and *Frogger Beyond* is reasonably good fun if you want to play a new-style *Frogger* game on a grown-up console rather than the handhelds it's rather better suited to. *The Rescue* is better, though.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PC, Xbox or GameCube.



» This is as far as I could bear to play into *Forgotten Relic* again to get a screenshot.

2003
FROGGER'S JOURNEY: FORGOTTEN RELIC (GBA)

Continuing its ill-advised experimentation on the GBA, Konami next decided to turn out another *Zelda*-inspired RPG, this time modelled after the SNES incarnation of the classic Nintendo series. Like many second-rate *Zelda* wannabes, what that basically amounts to is endless back-and-forth errand running, with almost nothing in the way of actual gameplay to speak of, and certainly nothing bearing even a slight passing connection to *Frogger*. The nearest it gets to either are a few lengthy maze sections with coins to collect and enemies to dodge, but they're nothing a six-year-old couldn't cope with and appear to exist only as a token attempt to break up the cut-scenes and hackneyed plot (which, incidentally, casts Frogger as a sort if Indiana Jones-type all-action archaeologist). Appropriately enough, this is a highly forgettable game.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



» How the hell does he fit that enormous tongue into his tiny little head?

2005
FROGGER: ANCIENT SHADOW (PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE)

Konami farmed this one out to highly respected developers Hudson Soft, so it comes as something of a surprise that it's such an unmitigatedly loathsome heap of stinking pigshit. Your reporter hasn't hated a game this much in years, and the fact that it's aimed at kids makes me shudder – no wonder the country's full of savage little ten-year-old chavs knifing each other for their mobile phones if they've spent their formative years having this sort of thing inflicted on them in the name of recreational fun. This surly, dishonest, spiteful excuse for a game mostly comprises contorting the stupidly overcomplicated controls to jump hopefully into thin air as you try to guess where platforms are from the impossible-to-judge perspective, and hoping that if you do land on one it isn't going to suddenly collapse beneath you without warning despite looking identical to a safe one, using up half of your tiny energy pie which once exhausted dumps you all the way back past the last three checkpoints to the very start of a long, agonisingly tedious level. If it does, there's no shame in a few tears – *Frogger: Ancient Shadow* could make a statue cry. It's just about the worst thing anyone's done to children since the Moors Murders.

PLAY IT NOW ON: A day when you want to make yourself really angry.

» Among its many mini-games, *Helmet Chaos* includes one called 'Rib-It'. A little tribute to the overlooked 1991 arcade game, or just a weak pun? Only you can decide.

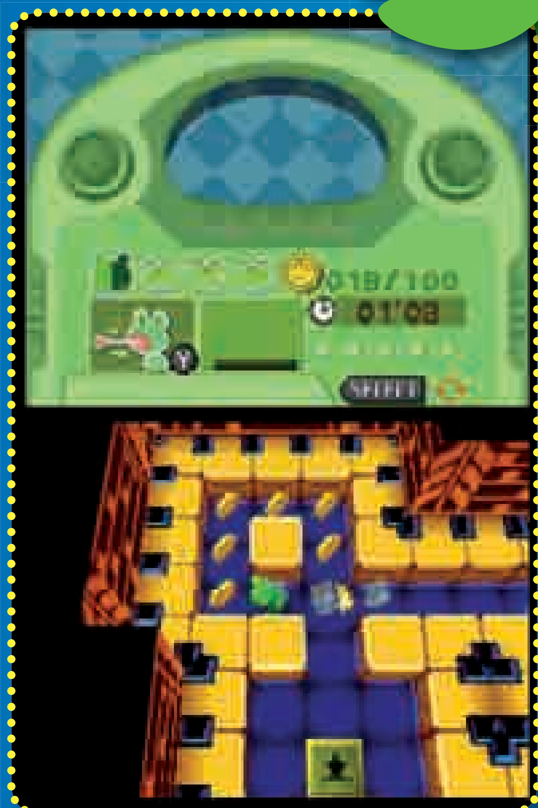


2005
FROGGER: HELMET CHAOS (DS, PSP)

Released on the same day as *Ancient Shadow*, fortunately *Helmet Chaos* is an altogether less grotesque affair, belonging to the same puzzle-centric bloodline as *The Rescue* rather than the faster-paced platforming of *Temple Of The Frog* or *The Lost Wand*. It's got some neat touches of its own, such as when it suddenly turns into a *Super Monkey Ball* clone a few levels in, and also boasts a rather lovely cartoony polygon-graphics remake of the original *Frogger*, which makes use of both DS screens to replicate the coin-op's vertical orientation (on the PSP you have to rotate the console 90 degrees to play the *Frogger* remake, which is horrible, but the main game has slightly prettier graphics to compensate). There are several other mini-games to unlock too, and lots of fun interludes to break up the in-game action (such as an impromptu version of the Game & Watch classic *Fire*), and generally this is a warm-hearted and pleasant, if never exactly thrilling, modern-style *Frogger*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: If only for the superior remake of the arcade game, the DS version is the best choice.

» Risking DEATH ITSELF for you, the readers of RG, I eventually managed to conquer the river race by elaborate cheating. The subsequent stages are even more ghastly, mixing all the tortuous, dishonest grinds of the earlier stages with the split-second reactions of PS1 *Frogger* and even more stomach-churning plot expositions.



2006
MY FROGGER TOY TRIALS (DS)

Oh man. As appalling as *Ancient Shadow* was, at least it didn't (to the best of this writer's knowledge) give anyone brain damage. *My Frogger Toy Trials* can't even make that claim. At first it's superficially like *The Rescue* again, albeit this time disfigured with a thick, choking layer of toe-curlingly twee *Pokémon*-type plot involving lots of tedious hub-shuttling and cut-scene-watching to get between the actual game stages. But after about half an hour of dull, barely-disguised tutorial levels full of unfair nastiness like blind leaps into danger and perspective tricks comes an interlude for which this reporter sincerely hopes the designer falls under a steamroller and is very slowly and painfully crushed to death, feet-first.

It takes the form of a water race in which the unfortunate player is compelled to (oh no) blow into the DS microphone to propel his floating frog, for OVER A MINUTE. Doesn't sound like much? Try it now – blow as hard as you can, without pausing, for about 70 seconds (which is what you'll have to do to stay in front of your opponent, a single touch from whom loses you the race). Just don't do it on your own, as the oxygen starvation to your brain will more than likely cause you to faint and you don't want to bang your head on anything sharp when you fall over (I stopped, light-headed, after 15 seconds). Even if you don't die, if you're not an Olympic triathlete the game might as well end at that point, so unless you want to spend £30 for 25 minutes of annoying, frustrating maze-trekking, steer clear of this criminally irresponsible garbage like it was a drunk and coughing tramp waving a hypodermic needle.

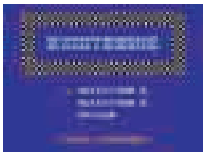
PLAY IT NOW ON: For God's sake don't. RG can't afford to have half its readers die.

2007
KONAMI KIDS PLAYGROUND: FROGGER HOP, SKIP & JUMPIN' FUN (PS2)

I haven't played this semi-educational dance-mat game aimed at pre-school children (it's not due out till later in the year, so we don't even have a screenshot of it), but after *Toy Trials* I imagine it's about getting the lids off Mummy and Daddy's medicine bottles, drinking stuff you find in the cupboard under the kitchen sink, and playing in heavy traffic. Actually, that last one's probably true, isn't it?

EXCITEBIKE

BIKES... THAT EXCITE



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** RACER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+, 500 POINTS FOR WII VERSION



HISTORY

You've got to hand it to Shigeru Miyamoto, he certainly knows how to make great games. Take the brilliant *Excitebike* for example. It doesn't look too special with its just about functional backgrounds, teeny weeny (yet rather cute) motorbike sprites and the sort of sound effects that will cause your ears to shut down in protest, but if you look deeper you'll find that beneath the rudimentary aesthetics lies that typical Midas, sorry, Miyamoto touch.

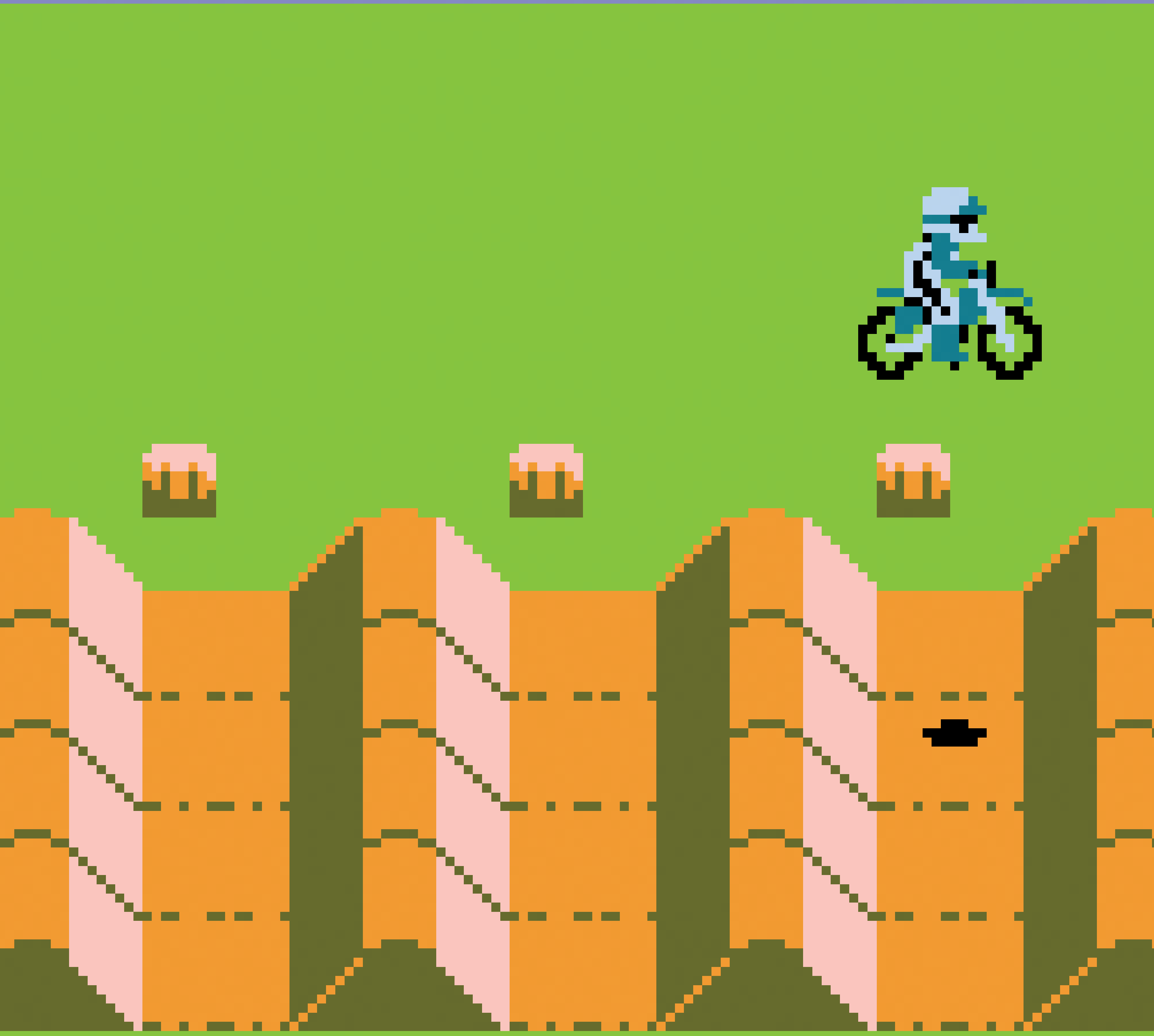
A simple time attack trial at its pulsing heart, *Excitebike* requires you to do nothing more then race through a selection of cleverly designed courses as quickly as possible. Sure, you'll have to occasionally keep an eye on your temperature gauge to make sure your bike doesn't overheat, but that's about as complicated as *Excitebike* gets.

While the single-player time trials are pretty good fun – 21 years on and I'm still returning to them thanks to the recent Virtual Console release – it's racing against the three computer opponents that really helps to elevate Nintendo's racer above similar games of the time. Beautifully paced, your three competitors are initially fairly easy to beat, but as the levels progress you have a real fight on your hands if you want to walk away with first place.

When you've finally exhausted the single-player time trials, and have become bored with constantly beating the computer's AI, *Excitebike* has one more trick up its sleeve – a sublime edit mode. While you'll initially spend all your time devising the sort of devious ramps and jumps that even Evil Knievel would think long and hard about jumping across, you'll soon take it all seriously and begin to create courses that really test your mettle. And that's the beauty of *Excitebike* – the more put into Nintendo's superb little racer, the more you'll continue to get out of it. And if that's not the quality of a good game then I don't know what is.



NINTENDO





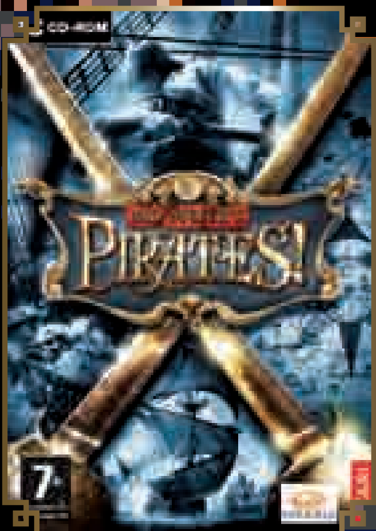
THE MAKING OF...

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

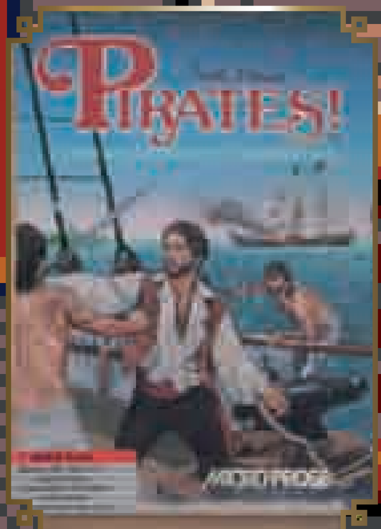
Thanks to the swoonsome Johnny Depp and the geek-o-rama of internet memes, pirates are back in fashion. But to gamers they never disappeared from public consciousness, thanks to Sid Meier and his ace Pirates! franchise. Sean Smith speaks, in an exaggerated piratical lilt, to a legend of the high seas...



» Perfect proof that pirates are bigger than ever. Expect the third film to be massive.



» The swanky new boxart for the swanky new game.



» Chuck Norris assaults a naked man as the bloke from the R Whites advert, looking worse for wear, climbs aboard.

Sid Meier has been featured numerous times in these hallowed pages, and not without good reason. Currently director of creative development at Firaxis games, if it wasn't for his mercurial talents, then us gamers would have never known what it was like to lead a life of debauchery, cutlass deaths and large chests of bling-bling doubloons on the cruel seas. Nor could we go head to head with a series of legendary historical leaders, building and learning and annexing along the way to achieving the ultimate civilisation. You don't get inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame for nothing. And our Sid was, along with the likes of Shigeru Miyamoto. Many top efforts have sprung forth from his creative mind, but given its blend of action, strategy and real-life facts, *Pirates!* remains a firm favourite with us Retro Gamers, and the reason why we cornered him and threatened the plank if he didn't speak to us about the creation of his classic game. Reluctantly, he agreed - in exchange for half a barrel of rum and some maggoty biscuits...

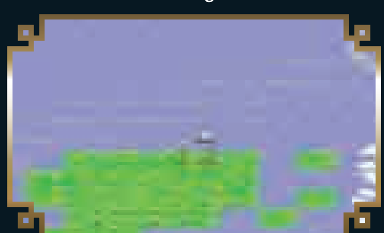
First thing then – perhaps an obvious question, but we were keen to know Meier's inspiration for the original *Pirates!* game. Was it based on any particular films or books or did he just have an overwhelming love for the swarthy sailors? "I've always been fascinated with pirates since my childhood", explains Meier, a statement that rang true with 99 per cent of small boys we recently surveyed. "As a kid I would play pirate games, read pirate books and watch old Errol Flynn pirate movies. I think pirates have always been fun and intriguing to people of all ages. So it seemed like a perfect topic for a computer game – a swashbuckling adventure combined with many fantastical elements in a game that includes strategy, role-playing, action, and adventure – all coming to life before your very eyes."

The 1987 MicroProse classic was a genre-straddling epic, that saw you control a privateer (basically a government-funded mercenary given carte blanche to attack other ships for money – a bit like Dog The Bounty hunter but with more frilly shirts) sailing around the Spanish main between the 16th and 18th Centuries. Once you select your allegiance to England, France, Spain or the Netherlands, you enter an open-ended game experience incorporating trade, fencing battles, acquisition of land, naval battles and incredibly realistic weather-based navigation, it still stands up very well today, even in its original Commodore 64 form. It also received numerous accolades, including a prestigious Charles S. Roberts award at the Origins International Game Expo. There is still a thriving community of fans who revere the original *Pirates!*, even in spite of the recent update and 1993 sequel *Pirates! Gold* that added more complex real-time strategy elements and was released for DOS, Mega Drive and the ill-fated CD32.

We asked Meier how involved he was in the original process, and what the work environment was like back when he was working on his nautical masterpiece. "I was the sole programmer on the original version programmed on the Commodore 64", he reveals. "I had been doing a lot of programming at home on the Atari, but we felt the Commodore had the largest market, so we decided to create the game for that platform first and then port it to others as it made sense. I think I would have been equally happy on either platform at that time. The workplace? Ahhhh the good ol' days! There were very few people on the development team for the original *Pirates!* (maybe five or six). The work environment was as fun then as it is now. After all, we make games for a living so how can work be anything other than fun!"

It must've cost quite a lot and been rather time consuming though? "Frankly, I really don't know. Bill (Stealey) handled all of that kind of stuff and I stayed focused on making a fun game, so I don't have those types of figures stored in my memory. Obviously, both the financial investment and man-hours were far less than it would be today." The relationship between Stealey and Meier was obviously a productive one because they eventually founded MicroProse. We were keen to know if Meier was still in touch with Stealey after leaving the company in 1996.

"Bill and I still keep in touch", he tells us. "Our relationship at MicroProse was that I would make the games and he



» Primitive visuals, but superlative, in-depth gameplay.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION
SYSTEMS: SNES, MS-DOS, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1991

GUNSHIP
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1986

FALCON 4.0
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1998



IN THE KNOW



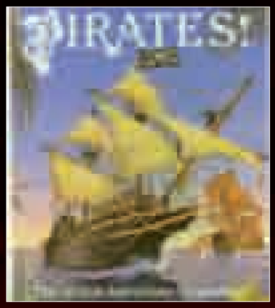
» **DEVELOPER:** MICROPROSE

» **RELEASED:** 1987

» **SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64

» **OTHER SYSTEMS:** AMIGA, APPLE II, ATARI ST, AMSTRAD CPC, NES, MACINTOSH, APPLE II GS

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



PIRATES!

PIRATES! FOR THE Wii?

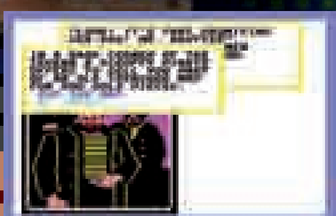
Pirates! was updated for Xbox and Windows in 2004 to unanimous plaudits from the games world. With a hearty new 3D engine and additions to gameplay, the newer title has recently been released on the PSP thanks to developer Full Fat and Firaxis. What did the man himself reckon on the new effort? "Full Fat did a great job re-designing this feature to perform really well on the handheld. Other fun features in the PSP version are the way-cool wireless multiplayer, treasure hunting, stealthily sneaking around towns, and the land and sea battles every pirate lives to fight." Is there... dancing? "Yes – you can still dance your way into the heart of the Governor's daughter!" And with the power of Wii (think: sword fights) – can we expect some motion-sensitive pirate shenanigans? "As far as a Wii version goes it's certainly something we're considering and we'll keep you posted if we decide to move forward on production." Yesssss!



» A Norwich-supporting hardcase lays the smack down on Jenny's old man.



» After the war, Captain Mainwaring did a nifty trade in cannonballs and cane sugar.



» 500 pieces will get you more than a treasure map down my local.



» One of the graphically superior ports in action.

would market them, so he didn't really get involved in the design process. He was the driving force behind the idea of putting my name on the box above the title of the games. Since I had so many different interests and wanted to make games about a wide range of topics, Bill wanted to make sure that people knew I was the designer of each new game so we could keep the fans with us. In retrospect, it was a pretty good thing to do. We all left on good terms and remain friends to this day. It was a good time to move on to a new venture and things have worked out well."

All's well that ends well, then. But let's get back to the actual game.

Pirates!, like many of Meier's canon, is highly educational. In fact, some right-on teachers, not including any that taught yours truly, I might add, have taken to using Meier's games as a classroom tool. We all know that in real life, pirates speak in a really cool voice, have impressive beards and wear a brightly coloured parrot on their soldier. But how much do we know about what it was like to steer them big boats around the Caribbean in the face of winds and tides and compasses and stuff? And just how much do we really know about the many islands, nations and outcrops that were the setting for much pirate-related derring-do? Playing the game is an eye opener in this respect. Was the pseudo-education element intended? "My intention in making a game is always to entertain the player – I want to make the player the centre of the story and give them a chance to be something or do something great – and have tons of fun doing it", continues Meier. "The fact that our games also have a learning element to them is kind of a reflection of the topics we choose and how we present them. It's wonderful that games like *Pirates!*, *Civilization* and *Railroads* are being used in classrooms to teach subjects like history, economics, communication etc. We didn't plan for that to happen but are thrilled that it has. Our number one priority is always fun!"

Here at Retro Gamer, we remember the C64 version most fondly, evoking childhood memories of trading spices in Belize, getting battered on low-quality sugarcane-based distilled spirits and whipping the bo'sun with the cat o' nine tails. But which version of the game is Mr Meier's favourite? "I too would consider the C64 version to be the definitive version of the original *Pirates!*, mainly because it's the very first version of the game that I programmed and the one that established the style of gameplay that set the stage for the others. All of the ports were based on the C64 original and done by other teams with some oversight from me. The Sega Genesis and Commodore Amiga versions were excellent. Of course now the 2004 version is my favourite."

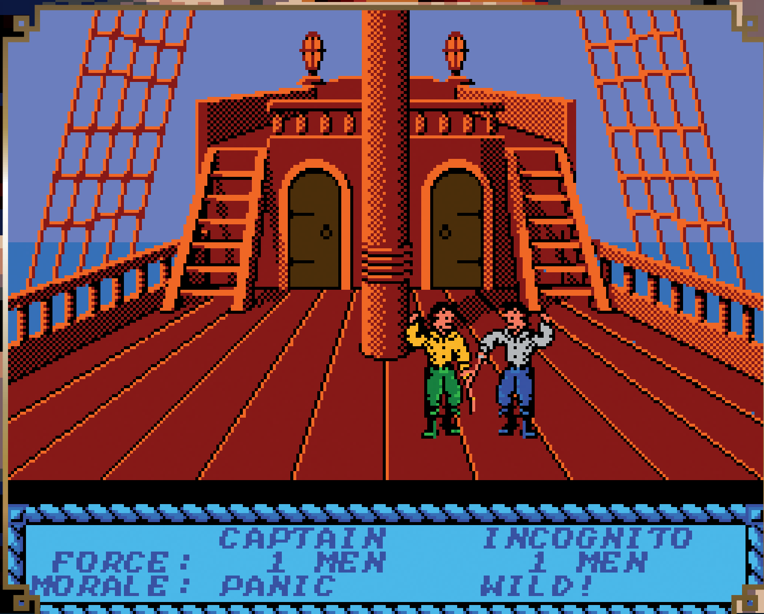
We wholeheartedly agree – the updated versions are brilliant – and given that the Xbox version will set you back a couple of quid, and remarkably, actually works in a 360, there really is no excuse not to don the pantaloons and get involved. But how did working on the newer versions compare to those from 'back in the day'? "With the new version of *Pirates!* in 2004, I was the designer and primary gameplay programmer on the PC version of the game (and had a great team of other programmers working with me) and then gave guidance to one of our Firaxis development teams when



» They may have rocked some girly threads, but these privateer guys could shish-kebab your ass.



» Sparrow: The ladies choice.



» The super NES effort.

they were creating *Pirates!* for the Xbox. Full Fat developed *Pirates!* for the PSP in collaboration with a group of us at Firaxis. We helped to make sure the PSP version delivered the gaming experience that folks have enjoyed on the PC and Xbox – and they did a fantastic job!"

Another thing we can remember from the old days were the extraordinary lengths that games companies would go to in order to prevent, ironically, piracy. "Piracy is theft, kids", they would scream, as we formatted another Amiga disc and painstakingly photocopied, nay, recreated that spinning wheel thing from *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. Over to you, Sid: "Real-life piracy is a bad thing! The copy protection measures have evolved with the sophistication of those trying to pirate the games. I think the original C64 *Pirates!* used a manual-based approach that asked the player to look up where the treasure fleet would be in a certain month. The beauty of this approach is that it is somewhat educational and it helps the player learn an important aspect of the game. It was also very important to us that players who knew the game really well would just know the answers without having to look them up. Plus, on-disc errors used for copy protection on the C64 would cause the drive head to bash against the side of the case and that would make the drives go out of alignment quickly – no one deserves that! Since then, we have gone through lots of other approaches from code wheels of varying complexity to crazy red filter glasses, all the way up to modern systems with disc-based errors as well as in-game checks. Sometimes I long for the simpler code wheel days of yore..."

Once we felt we had held the poor beggar at cutlass-point for long enough, we began to untie Meier – but wouldn't let him high-tail it back to Maryland without asking him the few burning questions that we really wanted to ask. Firstly, we remembered how he used his own mug in some of his other games. Science Advisor in *Civi*? That was Sid. "I think that young player character is the spitting image of me as a strapping young lad!" Ninjas versus pirates, who wins? "Ninjas are mere bilge rats that any pirate worth his salt could skewer for his evening grub!" Talk Like A Pirate Day. Sub Rag-Week stunt or valid concern? "Avast me hearties me thinks the scallywags who invented 'Talk Like A Pirate Day" are pillars of pirattitude and heroes to all of us salty dog wannabes. Arrr!"

Finally, you were once quoted as saying: "A game is a series of interesting choices." This certainly was the case with *Pirates!* and many of your games since. If you had to sum up *Pirates!* in one sentence, what would it be?

"*Pirates!* sends players on a wonderfully fun adventure to become the most feared or revered (you decide) pirate in the Caribbean – without the threat of scurvy"

Erm, arrrrrrrrrrrrrr!

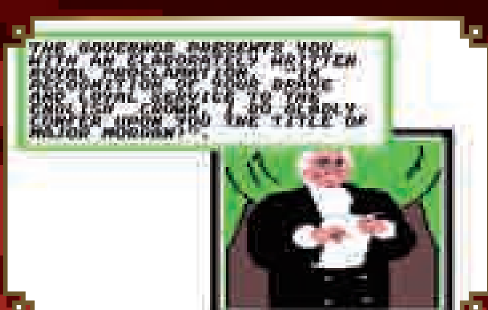
PIRATES! IN THE PIPELINE?

Crown And Cutlass is a popular open source game inspired by *Pirates!*. What does Sid make of it? Will we ever see a *Pirates!* MMO? The thought of abusing American teenagers in a Long John Silver patois excites us, to say the least: "I wasn't aware of the game until you brought it up but it looks very interesting and the concept is very flattering. I'm in awe of the drive and dedication of gamers devoted to a particular game. They are the true lifeblood of this industry. In '87 there was no way to know what would be coming. There was no internet to unite fans all over the world and resources for development were harder to come by. Even now, I am amazed when I visit forums for the 2004 *Pirates!* and see people still posting and comparing strategies and results. We do think about a *Pirate!* MMO as it seems like a natural fit. It's not currently in our production plans but stay tuned."



» PSP action. I say! Look at the pieces of eight on that.

"AS A KID I WOULD PLAY PIRATE GAMES, READ PIRATE BOOKS AND WATCH OLD ERROL FLYNN PIRATE MOVIES. I THINK PIRATES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FUN AND INTRIGUING" SID MEIER



» Get in!



» The odds seem somewhat stacked against Morgan in this outing.



» The superior visuals of *Pirates! Gold*.

NES





WHAT'S IMMEDIATELY NOTICEABLE ABOUT ANY RETELLING OF THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM SAGA IS ITS RECOGNISED STATUS AS SAVIOUR OF THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY. WHILE THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE ON A GLOBAL SCALE, HERE IN THE UK THE NES HAD TO STRUGGLE AND FIGHT TO EARN ITS REPUTATION, NOT LEAST OF ALL AGAINST NINTENDO ITSELF. ALTHOUGH MUCH OF THE ACTION TOOK PLACE IN JAPAN AND THE US, THE INDUSTRY'S KNIGHT IN PLASTIC ARMOUR FACED VERY DIFFERENT BATTLES ON OUR SIDE OF THE POND TO BECOME THE LEGEND IT IS TODAY; AND IT FACED THEM ALONE.

Regardless of wildly erratic release dates, mastermind launch tactics, outstanding tech-specs and bewildering global sales figures, one aspect is paramount over all others: to talk about the NES is to talk about the rebirth of the videogame industry from the fires of a devastating market collapse.

But the industry has always been very much compartmentalised, and trends have never travelled well across the oceans. While America – the feeding ground of the avaricious developer – turned its back on videogames in the early Eighties, the Japanese continued with their normal game-playing lives quite happily, prompting relative newcomer, Nintendo, to bring its flourishing coin-op into homes.

THE HOME VIDEO COMPUTER

This was a more significant change for Nintendo than most gamers ever realised. Up until 1983, Nintendo would've been better described as an electronic toy manufacturer – not a software or game developer. Product ranges from lightgun clay pigeon shooting to electronic love testers were far more synonymous with the name Nintendo than any form of game mascot or living room-based entertainment.

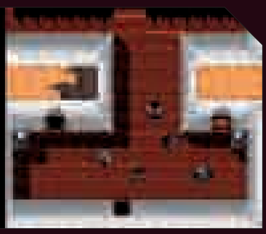
It was only natural for Nintendo to experiment with the *Pong* craze sweeping through the Seventies, and a decent addition to the list was made in conjunction with Mitsubishi in the shape of the TV Game 6 and its unimaginatively named successor, the TV Game 15 (I'll leave you to work out the difference between the two units yourself). Although a worthwhile introduction, the two systems did nothing to persuade Nintendo that home videogames were the future, and efforts shifted organically toward the arcades. Viewing from afar the self-destructive market saturation America was suffering from with home consoles in the late Seventies, Nintendo was resolute that pay-per-play was the only way money could be gleamed from videogames.

Rather astutely, however, it deviated slightly from standard product ranges in 1980 as industry legend Gunpei Yokoi developed the immortal and extraordinarily successful Game & Watch series of handheld LCD units with the help of his friend and colleague, Masayuki Uemura (whom Yokoi had poached from electronics giant Sharp). At the same time, fellow game design prodigy Shigeru Miyamoto was putting the finishing touches on Nintendo's eminent arcade smash, *Donkey Kong*.

This new arcade machine finally broke through the cultural barrier between the East and West, establishing Nintendo as a world gaming power overnight.

Not For Your Eyes

Over the years there have been many titles which either went unreleased, were altered several times before release, or were simply never translated from Japanese to English – great games which were painfully out of our reach. Thankfully in recent years, with the advent of the internet and obsessive fan groups, it's now possible to 'acquire' various unreleased titles, along with Japan-only games which have been fan translated. Frank Cifaldi's LostLevels.org is one such repository of unreleased games, making available titles like *California Raisins* (the beta cartridge of which sold for around a thousand dollars), *Sunman*, and also the uncensored version of *Maniac Mansion*. Elsewhere you can find the official English translation of the unreleased *Earthbound Zero* (a wonderful RPG). For unofficial fan-translations, ROMhacking.net will serve all your needs with access to loads of legal NES language patches. We recommend trying *Sweet Home* – it's an amazing horror RPG by Capcom and a pseudo-prequel to *Resident Evil*.



"THIS NEW MACHINE ESTABLISHED NINTENDO AS A WORLD GAMING POWER OVERNIGHT"





Year released: Japan: July 1985, UK: Late 1987

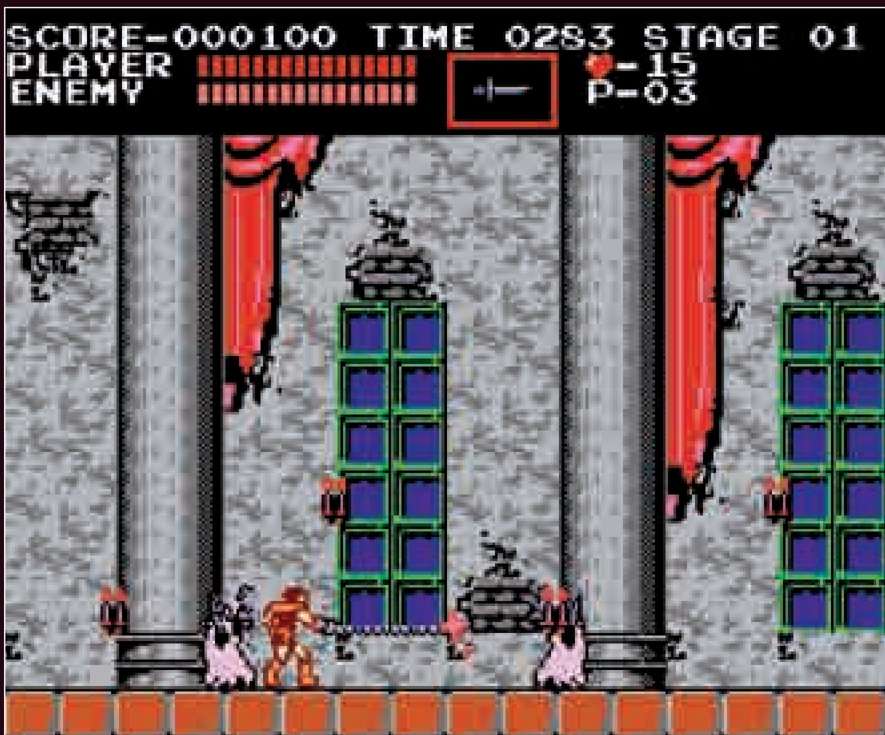
Original price: Japan: 54800 Yen, US: $199.99, UK: £149.99

Buy it now for: £20+

Associated magazines: None

Why the NES was great… Yes it was uglier that the Famicom, and the range of games were nowhere near as impressive, but there was still plenty to love about Nintendo's 8-bit console. Beautiful chunky carts came loaded with gaming greatness, and who could resist games like *Super Mario Bros* or *Duck Hunt*?

NES



» The humble NES *Castlevania*, which led to the brilliant *Castlevania IV*. Then the magnificent *Symphony Of The Night*. Then there was *Castlevania 64* which was… actually, scratch that last one. It was rubbish.

"IN AMERICA, THE MARKET HAD DISAPPEARED INTO A BLACK HOLE OF AVARICE, AND ALTHOUGH ALL THE COMPETITION HAD GONE WITH IT, SO HAD THE CUSTOMERS"

Realising this was hot property, Uemera was given the previously uninspiring task of getting Nintendo home gaming units firmly encamped beneath the TVs of Japan. His brief was at once simple and impossibly demanding: this new Nintendo system must be cheaper and higher quality than the closest competition (don't you just love how the Japanese refuse to pull their punches when it comes to setting targets?).

His concept was equally simple in application, yet intricate in construct. A major factor in Uemera's answer to this difficult question was his unexpected use of the revolutionary MOS 6502 CPU. An equivalent of the popular Motorola 68000 (designed by the same engineering team, in fact), Nintendo's choice of processor was surprising not because of the capability of the chip, but simply because of its age. The MOS 6502 was designed in 1975 and had already seen considerable use in the videogame industry, primarily in a cut-down version for the Atari 2600 and at the core of both the Apple I and II computers.

By the time Nintendo was drawing up designs for the Home Video Computer (as its first ROM cartridge system was designated during the prototyping stages), the MOS chip was a veritable home computing bargain, weighing in at less than $30 compared to the 68000's $179 price tag. When modified by long-lived Japanese electronics giant, Ricoh (who removed the binary decimal mode to make room for 22 extra memory registers for joypad input, sound generation, sprite based memory access and more), a deluge of game specific blood was squeezed from the revamped 'system-on-a-chip' stone.

THE BIG PUSH

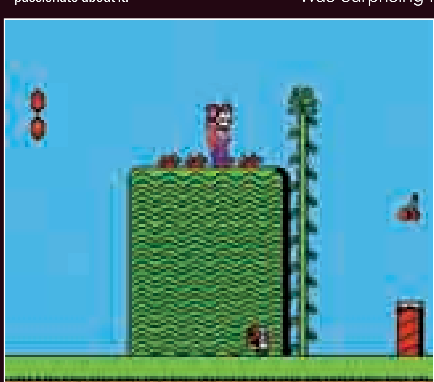
The final few months of development in 1983 brought all the different factions of Nintendo together in a way that united the company like never before. If there was a strength within the company, it was scrutinised, redeveloped and integrated into the renamed Nintendo Family Computer, or Famicom as it quickly became known (the developmental name was still acknowledged, however, in the system's hardware ID, HVC-xxx). The revolutionary control system of Yokoi's Game & Watch handhelds was built into the joypads (what we now rather sanitarily refer to as the D-pad), Miyamoto's *Donkey Kong* arcade stomper was beautifully converted for the launch, strict quality controls were built into future licensing deals and a plethora of peripherals were primed to take the bare bones base unit into the next-generation of home entertainment as soon as the competition showed any signs of panicked response.

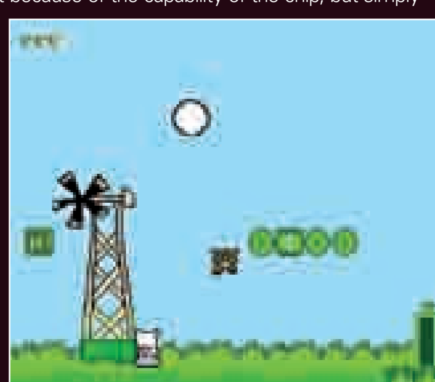
On July 15th 1983, Japanese stores rang to the sound of Nintendo based sales. But the launch was not without its problems. A glitch between an erratic chipset and their attachment to the motherboard caused consistent reliability issues, and president of Nintendo, Hiroshi Yamauchi made a bold decision to recall the entire first batch of Famicoms. The corporate danger of acknowledging an immediate design issue with the new console was, he stated, secondary to maintaining Nintendo's good name in the long term. Apparently the game-playing public agreed, and bearing no grudge against the console's troubled birth, the second release of the Famicom (featuring an entirely new chip set batch with round controller buttons replacing the previously square, prone to sticking, ones) was met with unprecedented success.

Over 500,000 units sold within the first two months of the second Japanese release, and the Famicom was subsequently distributed throughout East Asia. Retailing at ¥14,800, Nintendo managed to shift over 19 million units within its native shore alone during the impressively long lifespan of its beloved console. But over in America, the market had disappeared into a black hole of avarice, and although practically all the potential competition had gone with it, so had the customers.

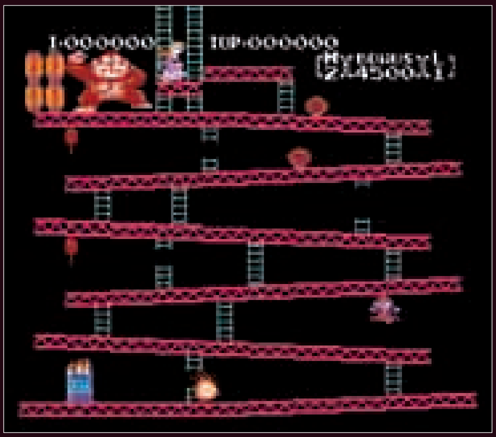
Much of the feeling around Nintendo was that the cultural divide was simply too great to bridge, and attention was better spent on local retailing. But just as he'd done with the coin-op business, Yamauchi was adamant that Nintendo was going Stateside with its games and hardware. Initial licensing and distribution talks with failing Atari quickly fell through, so the task once again fell to the beleaguered, yet proven capable, Nintendo of America.

» **Below left:** Originally co-developed by Fuji TV and Nintendo (with heavy Miyamoto involvement) for the Famicom Disk System, *Yume Koujou Doki Doki Panic* went on to be released as SMB2 in the West. **Right:** *Sack Of Flour* is a free homebrew project, showing that even though the NES is no longer around there are still people passionate about it.





» In Japan the system didn't launch with *Super Mario Bros.*, instead they received the below three titles. All were conversions of arcade games, and all three have connections to Miyamoto.







Fresh from its successful manufacture, launch and distribution of the *Donkey Kong* coin-op, NoA attempted to reignite the American gamer's consciousness with a somewhat pitiable demonstration of the Nintendo 'Advanced Video System' at the 1984 CES show. Many toy distributors openly laughed at the attempt to sell a games console, while others rushed past in embarrassment or cast vitriolic, vengeful gazes at the videogame hardware that had almost ruined them the year before.It was a categorical disaster.

IT'S NOT A VIDEOGAME. I SWEAR!

A stoutly traditional Japanese man, Yamauchi steadfastly refused to accept the American rejection of his console. So, for the 1985 CES show, the infinitely resourceful NoA team cleverly redesigned the machine into the Nintendo Entertainment System (renamed to remove any connotations of it being a videogame), deliberately creating a featureless, grey brick that in no way resembled a console, adding subtle nuances such as a front loading cartridge slot intended to make the system blend in with VCRs, distracting consumers from its real purpose as a videogame.

Packaged with a couple of fairly superfluous peripherals; a lightgun called the Zapper and R.O.B. the Robot (a marginally interactive remote controlled toy intended to work together with the games), the actual NES base unit was adequately camouflaged. This backdoor approach helped the system slip under the radar of many toy distributors, and as the Christmas season approached, the second phase of the American plan came into play.



» *Final Fantasy*, ironically titled because Square only had enough money to publish one final game. Luckily it was a huge success.

At considerable peril to their already tenuous branch of the Nintendo Empire, NoA offered New York shop owners a risk free option for stocking the NES console over the commercial sales period. Nintendo itself would set up the store displays and grant owners a sale or return policy. If the console bombed over Christmas '85, the only ones to lose out would be Nintendo.

The gambit, while not tremendously successful, provided one saving grace for the nervous salesmen at NoA. Consoles didn't fly off the shelves as hoped (moving around 50,000 units), but the steady and hopeful sales reassured shop owners that videogames were once again a viable commodity, and very few actually took Nintendo up on its return offer.

Miyamoto hadn't been sat idle during the US crisis, either, and during 1985 he worked tirelessly to shoehorn his second arcade smash hit, *Super Mario Bros.* into a Famicom cartridge. As always, he was unswervingly successful, and Nintendo collectively saw its opportunity to invade the US once and for all. By October, a Western version was ready to be bundled with the NES console – a tactic designed to coincide with NoA's move to go national with its in-house distribution network.

THE LOCKOUT

Piracy was soon rife in Japan, with cloned Famicom cartridges and cheap knockoff hardware flooding in from all across Asia. The Famicom contained no form of software security other than a strict licensing agreement which bound third-party developers to Nintendo's command. When the Famicom was redesigned for the world markets, several measures were taken to pre-empt any piracy or unlicensed development.

Some measures were simple and a direct quick-fix to the local troubles. World cartridges were a different shape and pin out, physically prohibiting the use of Japanese games in non-Asian consoles. A secondary, and far more complex system, was also installed in the NES machines, known as the 10NES regional lockout chip. This chip required security codes (which needed a specific and critical timing system to be applied during the code transfer) to be present on the cartridges, and the only way for developers to get these codes was to ensure their game was licensed by Nintendo.

Over the years Nintendo has been criticised for its militant approach to licensing and security, and many of those claims are

Generation Nex

The long and celebrated life of the NES is currently being put right back on life support in the US by hardware manufacturer Messiah. Its 'new old' console, the Generation: NEX is a neat little unit (not much bigger than two NES cartridges) that accepts and plays all old Nintendo Entertainment System games, whether they're US, European or even for the Japanese Famicom.

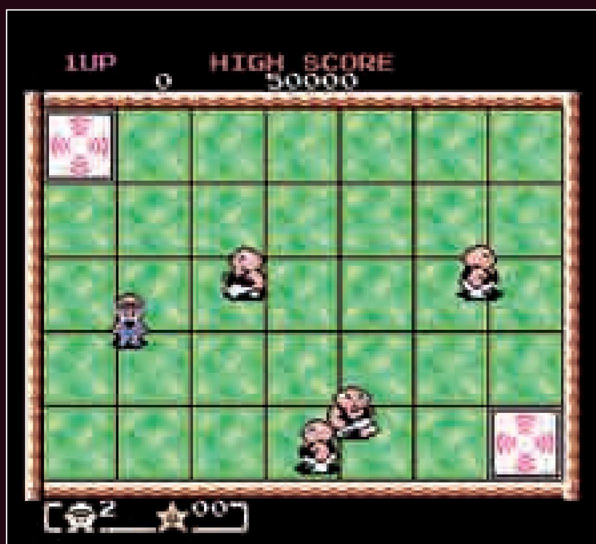
Sporting two cartridge slots (one on the top for Famicom games and one in the established 'front loading' position for NES carts), two controller ports identical to Nintendo's proprietary connectors allowing the use of any of your old peripherals, built in wireless receivers for the additionally available wireless controllers and composite video and audio outputs, this tiny and attractive little unit is surprisingly feature packed.



"SHOEHORNING SUPER MARIO BROS. INTO A FAMICOM CARTRIDGE WAS UNSWERVINGLY SUCCESSFUL – NINTENDO SAW ITS CHANCE TO INVADE THE US ONCE AND FOR ALL"

NES

"ALTHOUGH E.T. MAY HAVE PUSHED GAMERS OVER THE EDGE, IT WAS MERELY THE ICING ON A PARTICULARLY UNPALATABLE CAKE – NINTENDO WAS ADAMANT THE SAME WOULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ITS CONSOLE"



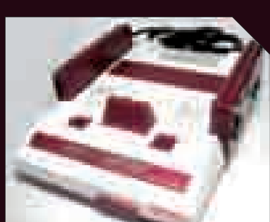
» This was the first game developed by the creator of *Pokémon*, and actually, it's rather good fun even today! Kick the tiles to knock enemies over and discover secrets.

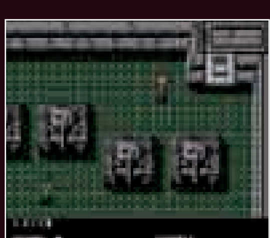
Famicom Love

The original concept of the Famicom (being a 'family computer') was reasonably explored with some great add-ons like the Disk System, keyboard, modem and a BASIC system. Some great games came out for the FDS (Famicom Disk System) that we never got to see. NES cartridges had a functionality removed that, on the Famicom, allowed games to access external sound hardware and produce far superior in-game audio. Conversions of Famicom games that took advantage of this feature are very noticeable by their underdeveloped internal audio.

The Famicom had no lockout system which, other than making piracy easier, allowed Japanese developers like Capcom, Konami and others to add improved technology to their game cartridges and provide technically advanced games. The 10NES lockout system in our machines prevented these technical improvements from working.

The Famicom's top loading cartridge slot proved considerably more reliable over time, being less prone to collecting oxidising dust on the edge connectors and being damaged by the sheering force of a misaligned cartridge entry (oo-er)





» *Metal Gear* didn't start out on the NES, fair enough, but it was the system Kojima wanted to develop for, and it was eventually ported – albeit in a butchered form.

valid. And yet, as we look back, the edges begin to blur as to the position Nintendo was actually in. The market had only recently collapsed, due in no small part to extreme negligence of the industry, churning out five years of expensive, atrocious quality games. Although *E.T.* may have finally pushed gamers over the edge, it was merely the icing on a particularly unpalatable cake, and Nintendo was adamant the same would never happen to its console – not after the hardship it had gone through in order to resurrect the market.

To comply with the 10NES lockout system, third-party developers had to sign a strict licensing agreement that limited them to producing only five games a year while granting Nintendo complete discretion when it came to quality control. While the majority of developers balked at such oppressive restrictions, others (such as Capcom, whose carefully chosen first three NES titles, *Commando*, *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and *1942* all sold over 1 million copies) accepted the severe stipulations and proved Nintendo's theories almost immediately.



» Does anyone else remember the Super Mario Bros 3 advert that had Mario's face made up of all the children in the world? We do.

The early successes were all the reassurance Nintendo needed to enforce its licensing agreement at all costs. Yamauchi had shown from the outset that maintaining a respected reputation was far more important to him than quick sales, and regardless of the incensed twittering of game developers eager to flood the market with mediocre games, his chokingly tight reins undoubtedly helped the console enjoy such a long life.

Unfortunately, not all developers agreed with Nintendo's philosophy, least of all the English ones.

SALE-ING THE SEVEN SEAS

The story of Nintendo's Japanese and American establishment has been well told, but there are a lot of other countries with a dedicated gaming population. In truth, Nintendo could reasonably ignore any other sales avenues as long as the Japanese and Americans were living and breathing videogames, and the European introduction was reduced to nothing short of a stilted, insulting addendum to an otherwise grand plan.

Unenthusiastic distribution deals began to filter NES consoles into Europe in late '86, beginning in Scandinavia and Germany, then spreading into Spain and France before finally being brought to the UK by Mattel in the third quarter of 1987. A distinct lack of interest from Nintendo itself, coupled with Mattel's reputation as a toy company and a delay which took the console out of the technological heats, made for a hurdle that was far too high to vault in one leap.

The Sega Master System had hit the UK ground running, and while the American market may have disappeared up its own… disk drive earlier in the decade, this had created a wealth of opportunity in Britain for affordable home computers. Competing with the superior, and better established, Sega machine was one thing, but taking on the likes of the ZX Spectrum and its prolific catalogue of games on its home turf, or the astounding next-generation gaming power of the Amiga, was another entirely.

Sega claims a great deal of responsibility for ensuring the NES never gained a foothold in the European market, though in truth much of the culpability lies with Nintendo's own indifference to Europe, and the UK in particular.

Its attention was still firmly trained on the US and Japan, where attention returned to the original concept of the Famicom – the family computer. Peripherals to deliver on the promise made by the system's name were steadily released: a disk drive, cassette deck, keyboard, modem and BASIC cartridges were all developed, with varying degrees of success, to allow Japanese Famicom owners to expand the potential of their prized machines.

By the time Nintendo International was established to take over from Mattel, Sega was tearing full steam ahead with the Mega Drive. This was the first chink in Nintendo's armour since 1983, and by ignoring the European markets, the company gave Sega the opportunity to maintain its developments and plan a strategy to work its way back into the primary markets. While Nintendo threw lawsuits about the place to sustain its dominion (attempting to stop everything from Rare's reverse engineering of the 10NES lockout chip to Codemaster's Game Genie peripheral and the various attempts at releasing unlicensed third-party software), Sega embraced many of the other companies and their videogaming products, granting them a platform while shoring up its increasing market share.





» Konami was generally regarded as the best of the third-party developers, creating classic after classic, like *Contra* here.

Aside from the shabby marketing, the late '87 UK release date of the console would have been the perfect time to own a NES. The harsh whips of Nintendo had ensured five years of only the finest games were ready and waiting. Developers had found their programming feet, while Nintendo's internal teams had fully dedicated their elite to making first-party titles. *Super Mario Bros.* came bundled for the reasonable price of £69.99 while the westernisation of Shigeru Miyamoto's celebrated *Legend Of Zelda* (the first cartridge to contain a battery backup save game feature) landed, quite by chance, at exactly the right time to reassure UK NES users.

Million-sellers were becoming increasingly common, yet the company's belief in its own divine status began to push developers to question the gospel and, thanks to the massive profits Nintendo's quality regime had imposed upon them, they had the power to push the limits. Nintendo's authority was slipping.

THERE ARE NO ENDS – ONLY NEW BEGINNINGS

Being abandoned in Europe had given the console the opportunity to grow on its own, unhindered by the Victorian parenting its American and Japanese cousins had known.



» Squint. No, squint harder. In fact, squint hard enough and this almost looks like *Metroid Prime*. Almost… well, if you're a tramp drunk on meths. Otherwise probably not.

Third-party developers had lost their interest in purchasing the Nintendo Seal of Quality and flagrant importing began all across Europe. The few Italian NES owners discovered they were in the same retailing bracket as the better supported UK, while Scandinavians openly swapped games among themselves and the Spanish. Cartridges were even developed which fired a voltage spike through the irksome 10NES chip, knocking it out and allowing unrestricted international sales of one development.

The Famicom and the NES had a strong following, but times had changed dramatically from the post-apocalyptic wasteland the machine was born into. The system was simply unable to provide the technologically advanced arcade conversions gamers were demanding. Yet this new loose leash publishers were enjoying with NES cartridges provided a crutch, which enabled the console to enter old age more gracefully than any other system had managed before it.

It was midway through the Nineties, and although people weren't queuing up to buy NES games at midnight, neither did they resent picking up the odd Nintendo bargain even as late as 1996. By this time, the NES had once again been redesigned to account for, among other things, failing cartridge connectors which had suffered from their horizontal orientation and gathered enough oxidising dust over the years to force users to bend and twist their games to coerce reliability from the struggling components.

Another price drop to £49.99 (seeing the console actually being out-priced by one of its own games for a short while) didn't hurt the life expectancy of the old campaigner either, and as the internet began to fully emerge, fan sites, homebrew programmers, hardware hackers and dedicated gamers began to form communities in celebration of Nintendo's grandfather console. Just as before, the NES didn't break any new sales figures but, along with its games, miraculously managed to retain its original value. Even today, NES games on eBay or in a charity shop are certainly not giveaways; five quid will buy you a cartridge without a box or instructions, but little else. Not too shabby for a 25-year old format.

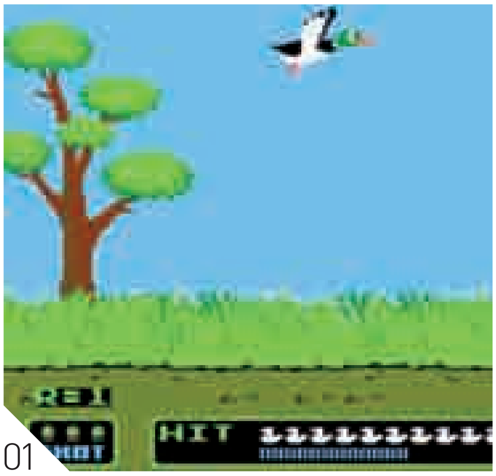
If anything, the impressively long life of the NES may actually have hurt Nintendo – dissuading players from upgrading to the Super NES upon demand – but it'd be hard for anyone, least of all its parent company, to resent this amazing machine for providing hundreds of thousands of hours of entertainment, billions of Yen in profit and 60 million gamers worldwide with something incredible to do with their thumbs.





NES PERFECT TEN GAMES

For owners without the cartridge cleaning kit; here are ten of the best wedges of grey plastic you'll ever blow into.



01



02

DUCK HUNT

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DONKEY KONG*

01 **Billed as the quintessential game for the clunky NES Zapper, Nintendo's repetitive duck-murdering simulator allowed gamers to test their aim with the aid of canine-cohort, Mr Peepers.** It was his job to startle a ball of petrified feathers into the air and yours to sight them in your pistol's crosshair. You had three shots per target and the later levels, which included infinitesimal clay pigeons, called for either a swift dead-aim or the cowardly act of pressing the gun barrel against the television. The game had a neat feature, which allowed duck-welfare enthusiasts to control the direction of the fleeing birds with a second pad and save them from a good buckshot stuffing.

SUPER MARIO BROS

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *F-ZERO*

02 **It was the block punching, pipe-travelling exploits of two Italian plumbers that finally administered the medicine to the videogame crash' of the Eighties, ridding it of the noxious Martian antibodies of Atari's *ET*.** Shigeru Miyamoto knew how to conjure up golden game icons and the Mario Bros are two of his most prolific. Placing the plumbers into a daring princess/mushroom rescue mission, inside a vivid, smooth-scrolling fantasy world, the game pioneered concepts such as level warping and head stomping. *Super Mario Bros* encapsulates everything that makes a game timeless: catchy theme, fluid gameplay, iconic characters and a hot princess.

RIVER CITY RANSOM

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNOS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DOUBLE DRAGON*

03 **Punch-bags meet sick-bags when Alex and Ryan receive a note from evil crime-lord Slick informing them their city is being held to ransom and Ryan's girlfriend has been abducted.** Welcome to *River City*, a place of tongue-in-cheek humour, cartoon violence and hard-up vomiting freshmen. Using anything they can lay their fists on, our protagonists set about the streets fighting through Slick's army of students. Their strategy: force them to 'barf' and pocket their loose change. *River City*'s unique fusion of a scrolling beat-'em-up and a subtle RPG make it a superlative NES classic.

MEGAMAN 2

» **RELEASED:** 1998
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DEVIL MAY CRY*

04 **Don't let *Megaman*'s mountainous energy bar fool you, trying to finish *Megaman 2* is like trying to stay alive without any kidneys.** This is an unforgiving platform blaster where each level demands pinpoint precision and patience. The order in which you blast through Dr Wily's levels is up to you, but don't think you can use the easier stages to stockpile lives. Each level houses a bionic-boss whose special power can be acquired. These abilities give Megaman an advantage over another boss, so choosing your route through the game was how you maintained a healthy blood pressure.

PUNCH-OUT!!

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *LYLAT WARS*

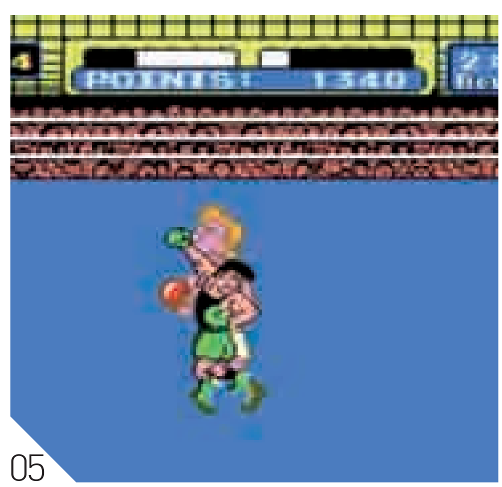
05 **Nintendo's port of its popular Eighties arcade puncher was somewhat lost in translation when it appeared in its 8-bit glory.** The arcade's transparent fighter was omitted and in his corner stood a pale, pint-sized pugilist on a mission to topple heavyweight hard-man, Mike Tyson. It quickly collected acclaim for its accessibility and colourful roster of cartoon boxers who were forced to sop up each blow of the games trademark playability. The NES homes the finest version of *Punch-Out!!*, still managing to pack more punch than its technically enhanced SNES sequel and arcade counterpart.



03



04



05

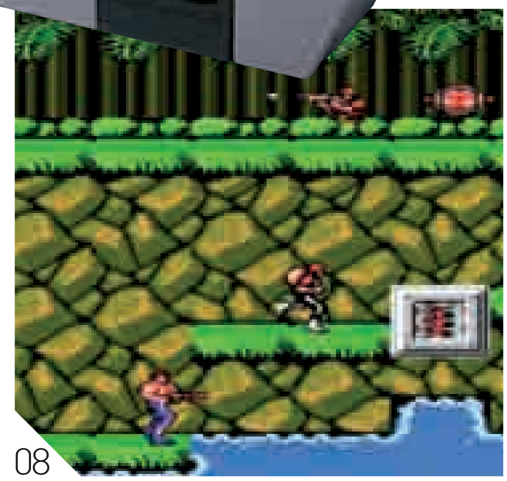




06



07



08

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *PILOTWINGS*

06 **Mario's goodbye gift to the NES is a marvel. It encapsulated all the qualities of the first game while introducing new elements now seen as essential to the series as Mario's flat cap and black moustache.** *Super Mario Bros 3* incorporated sub-bosses, multiple routes and mini-games, while embracing the notions of secrets and level warping. In fact, the game's so great, millions of Americans stood in unity to create a large image of his head using colourful T-shirts. Visible from space, it was a warning to ET to never release another game on our planet.

METROID

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *SUPER METROID*

07 **Long before Ms Croft raided her first tomb there was another tough female playing a central role in an iconic franchise.** Donning unflattering yellow armour and forced to wear a red spaceship on her head, you really couldn't tell whether Samus Aran was man, woman or beast. But one bash of the B button, sparking her elegant flip, gave us all the proof we needed. *Metroid* is a landmark NES title, the space shooter introduced password saves, non-linear levels and multiple endings. Its dark, menacing setting housed some truly freaky inhabitants, and the Giger-style levels really helped emanates a bleak, lonely atmosphere from inside the grey box.

CONTRA

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *METAL GEAR*

08 **It must be written into our genes that when visited by an alien it's customary to either destroy them or try to adopt them.** *Mario Bros* on steroids, the homeport of Konami's arcade hit *Contra* is considered to be the finest run-and-gun on the NES. It tells the story of two marines who are assigned the mission of welcoming an alien species by unloading an ungodly amount of ammunition into their deformed domes. The game presents some inspired character and level designs, the most memorable being the breach of an alien base, which switched the perspective from a side-scrolling blaster to a Cabal-style shooting gallery.



09

DOUBLE DRAGON 2 – THE REVENGE

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNOS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

09 **Taking on a darker tone than its predecessor, *Double Dragon 2* still follows the theme of the Lee brothers' ill luck with the opposite sex.** After their abducted girlfriend, Marian, is callously killed by Shadow Warrior, the brothers are forced into action. It's widely considered to be the finest of the three *Double Dragon* games released on the NES, due to its intuitive controls. It also introduced a much requested two-player co-op option and iconic moves like the Whirlwind Kick and the Hyper Uppercut – which looked a lot cooler than Billy and Jimmy's usual technique of pushing an enemy's head into their groin.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

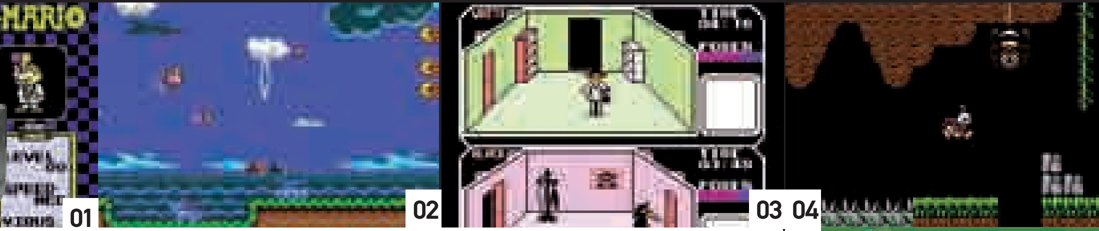
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *YOSHI'S ISLAND*

10 **Sheathed inside a majestic gold cartridge, *The Legend Of Zelda*'s tale of a nefarious powermonger, an ensnared princess and an elfin boy, bound together by unlikely heroism, was a chameleon of game genres that pioneered open-ended gameplay.** Link's first quest not only popularised adventure games, it established pivotal precedents that spoke out to all platforms. It outmoded high-score tables by exposing a greater desire in gamers for exploration and completion, and encapsulated perhaps the most respected and well-loved games ever created. It was fathered by Nintendo with a proud tenderness and the NES was there to videotape the birth.



10





NES and the rest...

There were literally hundreds of games for Nintendo's 8-bit console, ranging from the truly amazing to the terribly dire. Here are just a few of them.



01 DR MARIO
02 PARODIUS
03 SPY VS. SPY
04 DUCK TALES
05 IKARI WARRIORS
06 ROADBLASTERS
07 ARKANOID
08 GALAGA
09 LODE RUNNER
10 SOCCER
11 GUN.SMOKE
12 BALLOON FIGHT
13 MANIAC MANSION
14 ROD.LAND
15 COBRA TRIANGLE
16 KUNG FU
17 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
18 MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT
19 XEVIOUS
20 LEMMINGS
21 BLUE SHADOW
22 THE GOONIES II
23 PUYO PUYO
24 SUPER MARIO BROS
25 THE LAST NINJA
26 DONKEY KONG
27 PIRATES!
28 SOLOMON'S KEY
29 CASTLEVANIA
30 KICK OFF
31 RAMPAGE
32 GAUNTLET II
33 BASEBALL
34 LIFE FORCE
35 ADVENTURE ISLAND
36 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION II
37 SHATTERHAND
38 DOUBLE DRAGON
39 LUNAR POOL
40 RIVER CITY RANSOM
41 TENNIS
42 METAL GEAR
43 EXCITEBIKE
44 MS PAC-MAN
45 RENEGADE
46 NINJA GAIDEN
47 GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
48 CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE
49 BIONIC COMMANDO
50 MEGA MAN
51 STAR WARS
52 TETRIS 2
53 DUCK HUNT
54 HUANG DI
55 GHOSTBUSTERS II
56 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
57 ICE HOCKEY
58 SUPER MARIO BROS 2
59 TRACK & FIELD 2
60 THE ADVENTURES OF BAYOU BILLY
61 WARIO'S WOODS
62 DEVIL WORLD
63 SWORDS AND SERPENTS
64 PAPERBOY
65 RAMBO
66 PROBOTECTOR
67 FINAL FANTASY
68 CABAL
69 M.U.L.E.
70 RYGAR
71 GOLF
72 URBAN CHAMPION
73 PAC-MAN
74 SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
75 ROBOCOP
76 1942
77 YOSHI'S COOKIE
78 ICE CLIMBER
79 PRINCE OF PERSIA
80 WIZARDS & WARRIORS
81 QUINTY
82 COMMANDO
83 PUNCH-OUT!!
84 RUSH 'N ATTACK
85 SIDE POCKET
86 A BOY AND HIS BLOB
87 FANTASTIC DIZZY




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OK: THIS LOOKS LIKE THE OLD MANSION.
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I'M GETTING SLEEPY!
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THE FUTURE IS DEAD

THE RISE AND FALL OF VIRTUALITY



AT THE START OF THE NINETIES MANY LEADING VIDEOGAME EXPERTS WERE CONFIDENTLY PREDICTING THAT VIRTUAL REALITY WAS THE FUTURE INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT. SO WHAT WENT WRONG? DAMIEN MCFERRAN CAUTIOUSLY PEEKS INTO THE HISTORY BOOKS OF UK-BASED VIRTUALITY TO FIND OUT

"We're developing a technology that can allow a person to psychologically move from being in the real world to being totally immersed in a virtual world." These rather ostentatious words belong to Dr Jon Waldern – the man behind one of the UK's most intriguing videogame companies. Speaking in 1993, Waldern (who has a PhD in Computer Science) was understandably thrilled about the potential of 'Virtual Reality' – his Leicester-based company was rapidly becoming acknowledged as the world leader in this field. Established in 1987 with the primary aim of manufacturing 'location based' virtual reality experiences that could be sold to videogames arcades and bars, W Industries – better known as Virtuality – stood at the vanguard of the virtual reality revolution and assisted major industry players such as Sega and Atari as they took their first tentative steps into the world of 'immersive' videogaming. However, less than five years after Waldern had uttered the same epic words that opened this feature, the company was no more. The story of Virtuality is a sad tale of high expectations and shattered dreams, and in order to recount it best, Retro Gamer caught up with two former Virtuality employees, Matt Wilkinson and Don McIntyre.



» A screen from the very promising but sadly unreleased *Pac-Man* VR.



» The bulky first-generation headset caused some bitchin' neck-strain.

"I'd spent the last four or so years writing NES and SNES games not too far away at Rare and fancied a change to find out what this new-fangled 3D stuff was all about," says Matt Wilkinson, who worked as a lead developer with the company. "One Saturday, I walked up to the front door of the windowless industrial unit that was their office, CV in hand, and knocked. The guy who answered the door was Jon Waldern. He showed me around the place and hired me on the spot to work directly for him." Wilkinson wasted no time in making the short trip over the Warwickshire/Leicestershire border: "I resigned from Rare at 10am on Monday morning and started work at Virtuality at 11am that same day."

Don McIntyre, who joined the company a short while later to work on 3D design and software development, took a more conventional route. "I replied to a job ad in *The Guardian*," he says. "I was in the process of finishing an MSc in Computer Aided Engineering Design at Strathclyde University. My first degree was in Product Design so I had a good mixture of art and science. This may have appealed to Virtuality at the time."

For the intrepid duo the tantalising prospect of working with cutting-edge technology clearly represented a large



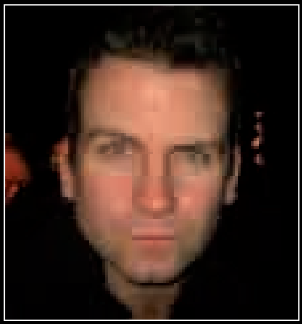
» Screens from the Kawasaki VR motorcycle training simulator.

"PERSUADING THE AVERAGE BLOKE ON THE STREET TO STRAP ON A HEADSET AND THEN FLAIL AROUND NOT KNOWING WHAT THEY LOOKED LIKE AND WHO WAS WATCHING THEM WAS A REAL HURDLE" – MATT WILKINSON

incentive for joining the Midlands-based group, but it soon became evident that selling the VR dream to the general public would be harder than anticipated. "It was both very interesting and at the same time a little frustrating," remarks Wilkinson. "Persuading the average bloke on the street to strap on a headset, still sweaty from the person before, and then flail around not knowing what they looked like and who was watching them was a real hurdle." Early omens didn't bode well, as he recalls: "The movie *Disclosure* came out a year or so after I joined the company and even Hollywood couldn't make people look cool with a VR headset on, so what hope did a real-life company using real-life technology have?"

The 'real life' technology in question was indeed crude by today's standards, but it must be remembered that back in the early Nineties 3D visuals were still very much in their infancy. "Looking back we were really making it up as we went along," comments McIntyre. "There were no standards set at the time in relation to 3D gaming." The initial batch of first-generation software may look visually unimpressive when compared to the standard gamers are accustomed to these days, but back in 1991 the polygon-pushing power behind Virtuality's units was astonishing. "The hardware was a PC with a huge custom hardware board slotted in," explains Wilkinson. "The heat they generated was immense and if you ever saw a Virtuality game crash in an arcade, it was usually heat-related. There were no actual graphics chips on the boards – they were dual processors that would do software rendering to the display memory," he recalls. "I guess for the time it was pretty powerful kit, but it quickly got left in the dust by the PC graphics cards that started to emerge."

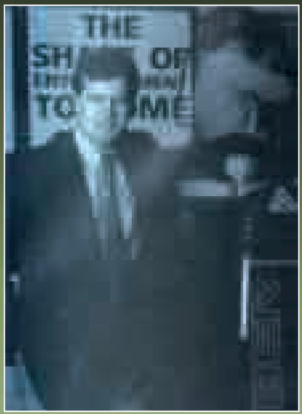
Of course, with VR, graphics are only one part of a much larger puzzle – the design of the headset itself was equally as crucial. "Available technology at the time meant our headsets were a little cumbersome and had cables all over the place," remembers Wilkinson. "The motion tracking was a magnetic sensor in the headset and in the handset, and



» Don McIntyre.



» Matt Wilkinson.



» Dr Jon Waldern in full-on 'business' mode.

THE FUTURE IS DEAD



» *Dactyl Nightmare* was an early but remarkably fun release.



although it was the best available at the time, it was still problematic. The cables could cause magnetic interference and if the tracker moved too far away from the big, heavy magnetic field generating box the output became very jittery. The effect inside the headset was akin to having an epileptic fit and was very unpleasant. We had various algorithms for reducing the jitter, but they all basically consisted of taking several readings over a few frames and averaging out the results. Of course, this then leads to 'lag' where you feel like your head is in treacle. It was a fine

DESPITE THE EARLY INDIFFERENCE SHOWN, HOLLYWOOD MOVIES LIKE THE LAWNMOWER MAN GLAMORISED VR AND HELPED GENERATE CONSIDERABLE INTEREST IN THE CONCEPT



balance, but when it worked correctly and with no interference, it worked very well," he remarks. "We also had to contend with issues such as frame rate," adds McIntyre. "If it dropped below 25 frames per second, then users felt sick."

Another issue cropped up early in development that had nothing to do with the headset at all, but rather what was going to be put inside it. "Everybody's eyes are a slightly different distance apart so the two LCD lenses had to be mounted on motors to allow the player to adjust the distance between them," comments Wilkinson. "Then you have the problem that everyone's eyes have different visual characteristics and there is no room for spectacles in the headset. Each LCD display had a focus control at the side of the headset to allow the player to adjust them for each eye." To accommodate these factors, the headsets were literally bursting with elaborate features and Wilkinson believes the team of engineers that created them deserve special praise: "The amount of complex and intricate hardware inside the headsets was incredible. I take my hat off to the small group of hardware designers and engineers that worked at Virtuality with a small budget."



» The Virtuality clothing range – see if you can spot McIntyre and Wilkinson…

Once the technology was working effectively the team faced another challenge – creating convincing reasons to actually put the headset on in the first place. "The actual development of our 'VR experiences' was fascinating," continues Wilkinson. It soon became clear that traditional gameplay values would have to be radically rethought. "We couldn't employ the same techniques used by console games because the whole point of our games was to involve turning the player's head," he continues. Unfortunately this revolutionary aspect of VR created further problems: "The moment you allow a player to control the direction of the camera by turning their head, you enter into a world of pain. How do you make the player look where you want? The number of times I'd watch people standing in a



» The zany *Shoot For Loot*, developed by Gremlin.

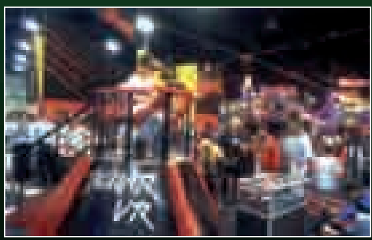


» Intended for the Jag VR, *Missile Command 3D* was eventually released without headset support.



corner and facing the wall was amazing. You have to hold the player's hand the whole way to ensure they actually have fun."

Although as a former Rare employee Wilkinson had helped to create smash hit games such as *Donkey Kong Country* and *Snake, Rattle 'N 'Roll*, his considerable experience didn't come as much benefit when it came to producing VR software. "Conventional types of games don't work as well as you might think," he states. "Virtuality did a coin-op game for Sega which involved being a gunner on a spaceship. You didn't do the flying, just the shooting, but it was easy to get shot by something you weren't looking at. Sega didn't like this because they said it was unfair to the player, so it was changed so that you would only take damage from something that was visible to you." Problem solved, right? Not quite. "It wasn't until after the game was in the arcades that someone realised you could complete the entire game with one credit, simply by staring at the floor the whole time," Wilkinson chuckles.



The fact that the notion of VR was so unfamiliar to the general public also proved extremely problematic. "Every machine needed operators to show people how to put the headset on because it was nothing like they had ever seen before," remembers Wilkinson. "It's obvious what to do with a joypad to even the least technical person, but show someone a headset and the weird thing you hold in your hand and it suddenly becomes a big barrier to entry." Because the cost of purchasing and running each machine was astronomically high, arcade operators were forced to charge a lot more per play – which further dissuaded prospective users from giving it a go. "I remember going to the Trocadero arcade in London to see our machines in action and they were charging three quid a go," recalls Wilkinson with a wince. "Three quid to get a sweaty head, look like a plonker and play a game in which you didn't really know what you were doing is not a recipe for repeat play. Especially when next to our machines is something like the Sega R360 cabinet of G-LOC, which would cost you 50p to sit in a gyroscope and be a fighter pilot, blowing the crap out of things while spinning upside down and looking cool."

Despite the early indifference shown towards the technology, Hollywood movies like *The Lawnmower Man* and the aforementioned *Disclosure* glamorised VR and helped generate considerable interest in the concept. Virtuality capitalised on this and successfully shipped pods to a variety of locations worldwide, with the US and Far East being two key markets. VR bars and cafés began to spring up with alarming regularity and such was the initial success of the system that units were purchased by the most unusual of clientele. "I seem to remember one of the engineers saying he had installed a couple of systems on the Sultan of Brunei's yacht," remarks McIntyre. But when you consider each pod was rumoured to cost somewhere in the region of $60,000, he was one of the few individuals on the planet that could actually afford them.

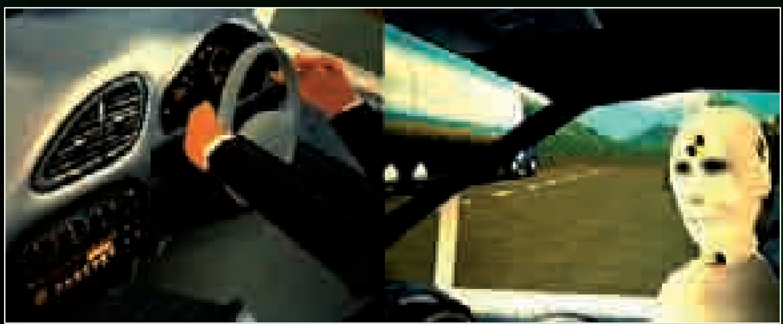
Amazingly, with only one exception – Gremlin's *Shoot For Loot* virtual game show – all of the software for Virtuality's pods was developed entirely in-house. Notable first-generation titles include the fantasy adventure *Legend Quest*, flight simulator *VTOL*, science-fiction shooter *Grid Busters* and the strangely addictive multiplayer *Dactyl Nightmare*. "Up to four users were placed in a platform-based immersive environment and had to shoot each other," explains McIntyre. "Unsurprisingly there was a 'Dactyl', which flew about and would swoop down pick up users after a certain amount of shots had been fired. Bizarrely enough, this appeared to happen regardless of whether or not the player was winning or losing. Despite the quirks, the game had a great atmosphere."

However, there was more to Virtuality than just games. Wilkinson also worked in

Have a Seat

Virtuality's pods came in a variety of flavours. The first machine was produced in 1991 and came in the form of a 'stand-up' unit – codenamed '1000CS'. When using this version, players experienced issues with motion tracking so Virtuality developed a 'sit-down' unit – the SD1000. "The sit-down machines were best because the player was in one place the whole time and wasn't lurching about like they did in the stand-ups," comments Wilkinson. The new sit-down units also made it easier to entice players. "The player didn't need to stand and so felt less vulnerable, they used joysticks that they were familiar with and it's easier to have a headset on while you're sitting down than it is when you're standing," he adds. Updated versions appeared in the form of the SU2000, SD2000 and *Total Recoil* – a stand-up variant that featured a recoiling 'Winchester' shotgun replica for shooting simulations.





» The 'Advanced Applications' produced Ford Galaxy VR promo.



» These units were recently sold on eBay – shipping must have been a killer.

THE FUTURE IS DEAD



» The second-gen title *Ghost Train* shows how far visual standards had progressed.



» Low-poly fantasy action in *Legend Quest* – keep an eye on your elf!



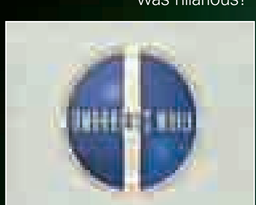
» The intro to the amazing *Buggy Ball*.

the 'Advanced Applications' department of the company, which proved to be tremendously lucrative. "These were bespoke experiences done for huge corporations that wanted a marketing gimmick for a release of a new product," he explains. "They paid big money for these and we had more work than we knew what to do with. A good example was the launch of the Ford Galaxy – Ford paid us to create an experience for the user where they were sitting in the passenger seat of a virtual Ford Galaxy, being driven by a chauffeur. You could use your virtual hand to operate the electric windows, cycle through interior and exterior styles, and all while the driver waffled on about how great it was. There would be little 'moments' where another Galaxy would overtake you with surfboards or bikes strapped to it to demonstrate the versatility of the vehicle. It was neat, and involved little in the way of user input. They could put the headset on, sit back, look around, and enjoy the ride. We did more of these than you could imagine and for a wide variety of clients all over the world."

Back in the realm of interactive entertainment, several leading hardware manufacturers were eyeing developments in the arcades with understandable interest. Many industry experts predicted that home-based VR would be the 'growth market' of the mid-Nineties and US veteran Atari decided to procure the assistance of Virtuality when it came to bringing truly immersive (yet affordable) gaming to the living room. "I spent several months working on a very cheap headset for the Atari Jaguar," remembers Wilkinson. "I was writing the incredibly complex code to translate the readings from the two infra-red sensors on the headset into head orientation. I was working with a genius called Terry, whom I think was one of the inventors of Radar, back in the day. He figured out all of the maths involved and then I had to figure out how to cram this mathematical nightmare onto a cut-down Z80 CPU with 4K of RAM and no floating point operations, and using nothing but assembly language. My bedroom days of writing games on the Spectrum came in very handy. It worked quite well as long as there was decent line-of-sight between the IR transmitter and the headset receivers." The unit was completed and along with *Missile Command 3D* was ready for production – but the fateful demise of Atari's 64-bit console meant that all of

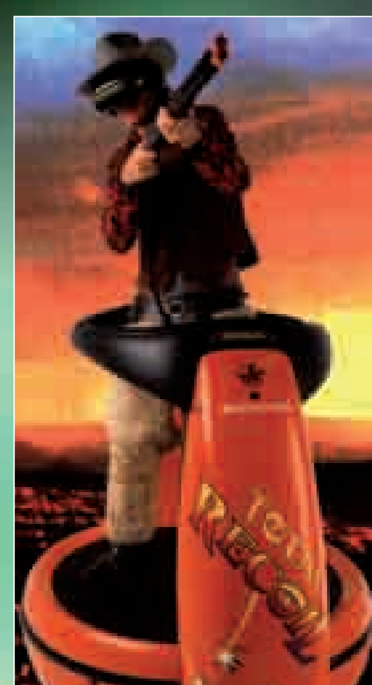
As Seen on TV

One of the first public showcases for Virtuality took place on the now defunct BBC TV show *Tomorrow's World*. Needless to say, things didn't exactly go according to plan. "They got everything set up in the studio ready for the live broadcast and the pods were working fine," recalls Wilkinson. "As show time approached the lights in the studio were all on, the heat rose and all of the Virtuality machines crashed and refused to boot. If you can find the footage of that show you'll see four people sitting in the pods moving their heads around and looking very VR-like, and it would cut between that and footage of the game they were playing. Well, the game they were meant to be playing – the footage was pre-recorded and the people in the pods didn't even have their machines switched on. It was hilarious!"





» Jaguar VR prototype unit – note the motion tracking spheres on the headset.



» *Total Recoil* came with a force feedback Winchester that Charlton Heston would've been proud of.



Wilkinson's hard graft was for naught. "Talk about backing the wrong horse!" he groans.

As the Nineties progressed, the previously frenzied public interest in VR began to wane. Without a true 'killer app' Virtuality found that many arcade operators had stopped supporting their expensive pods. A second-generation unit – the '2000' series – was created, but the fast-moving nature of the industry meant that even these enhanced machines were soon rendered obsolete. "Once the spec had been decided we had to stick to it to avoid maintenance problems," recalls Wilkinson. "So two years after the second-gen hardware came out, it was embarrassingly slow and out of date. The first PlayStation wiped the floor with our hardware."

Having said that, the second-generation of software benefited greatly from the improved graphical muscle found in the modernised pods and also exhibited numerous gameplay refinements thanks to the harsh lessons learnt from previous mistakes. "*Zone Hunter* was one of the first games to appear on the series two machines and probably the most successful," says McIntyre. "It was essentially a first-person shooter set above and below a city and it looked fantastic – especially for 1996." *Ghost Train* quickly followed, and built on the good work seen in *Zone Hunter*. "Within a three-minute VR arcade experience, users will get lost," McIntyre comments. "It takes at least that amount of time to become accustomed to the navigation system and the immersive environment. The solution is to pull the users through an experience and restrict their activity to shooting things and avoiding things. *Ghost Train* adhered to this by placing users on a train track and therefore they couldn't wander off into the abyss."

The games were unquestionably improving, but the system still lacked a title that made it truly essential. It's a shame then that the piece of software in question – the playfully named *Buggy Ball* – came so late in the life of the company. "This was developed by a guy called Martin Brownlow, who later worked at Shiny and LucasArts in the US," says McIntyre. "It's quite simply one of the best games I have ever played." Wilkinson expands on this: "It was done on our second-generation of sit-down cabinets which had the player sitting in a bucket seat with a mounted joystick at each hand, a headset on and a bass-rumbler device under the seat. Four people were linked up in the same game and all chose a vehicle, ranging from a heavy monster-truck type thing to a lightweight super speedy car – each had its own handling characteristics. The arena was simply a big soup-bowl and a large football was dropped into the middle. Players could score points by bashing the ball out of the bowl to score a 'goal', doing stunts akin to a skateboarder on a half pipe or by having the best crash with other players. The VR came into play because you had to be constantly looking around for where the ball or other players were. There was no plot, no complicated gameplay mechanics, just a five-minute game of pure adrenaline and fun. You couldn't get the Virtuality employees out of the damn thing – we even had tournaments every Friday. Sadly, most arcades had already given up on the very expensive machines because nobody had played the previous and over-complex games."

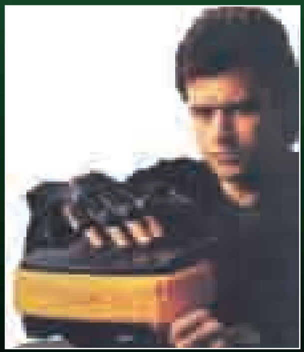
As the 32-bit generation began to pick up speed, the outlook for Virtuality (and



» Jon Waldern's 'Digilens' company produced smaller, more advanced headset technology

Explosive Stuff

One of the more amusing anecdotes from the Virtality vaults involves CEO Jon Waldern and a rather unique monitor at IBM. "I accompanied Jon to a meeting in America at IBM's headquarters" Wilkinson explains. Whilst setting up the presentation, a minor problem arose: "The gigantic monitor supplied by IBM simply refused to display a picture from the output of Jon's laptop. After ten minutes of me trying in vain, Jon decides to put on his IT hat and give me a hand. He yanks the VGA plug from the back of his laptop and examines it. 'Ah! Here's the problem, two of the pins are bent over.' He spent a few minutes with a pen, poking around to unbend the pins and straighten them out. Very happy with himself at fixing the problem, he plugged the monitor back into his laptop. I was told afterwards that the bang was heard several corridors away. The monitor was one of their experimental ones that had a few extra pins for some 'special' test functionality – they were bent over for safety purposes!"



» Cool or fool? We'll let you decide.

"TWO YEARS AFTER THE SECOND-GEN HARDWARE CAME OUT, THE 2000 SERIES WAS SLOW AND OUT OF DATE. THE PLAYSTATION WIPED THE FLOOR WITH OUR HARDWARE" – MATT WILKINSON

THE FUTURE IS DEAD







» Shooting fun with *Trap Master.*

VR in general) was bleak. A contract to develop a VR motorcycle-training simulator for Japanese firm Kawasaki kept things afloat for a time but with public interest at an all time low, the ailing group started to haemorrhage cash. Ironically, it was at this time that McIntyre found himself working on a game that had the potential to revitalise the deflated business – a VR interpretation of Namco's loveable *Pac-Man*. "Personally, I thought it was great – though I would say that as I was the 3D artist," says McIntyre. "Unfortunately, the company folded before it saw the light of day. It was probably one of the best things we did."

In 1997 things finally came to a head. "The share price crashed and the receivers were called in," McIntyre recalls. "Departments were liquidated one by one with software development and design being among the last to go." Wilkinson remembers this torrid time with a degree of visible discomfort: "I stuck it out fairly far into the administration process, which was a horrible time to be at a company we all helped build and that we cared about," he recalls, sadly. "The seemingly arbitrary decisions of what was sold off and for how much was so impersonal. There was a strong camaraderie within the production folk who were left and that made those months bearable as we watched the building become more and more devoid of people and equipment. As the end drew near everybody had to look out for themselves and one day I got a call from a friend of mine who had left a few months earlier and he asked me if I wanted to go and be a lead programmer at Psygnosis, and I agreed." Many people within the firm didn't want to surrender hope of a revival but Wilkinson was painfully aware of the gravity of the situation: "The writing was well and truly on the wall at this point. All potential investors had second thoughts, and a couple of proposed management buyouts had fallen flat. It was the end of the line. There were some people who stuck it out until they were literally locked out of the building one day. Pretty much nobody heard from Jon again." Wilkinson, who was himself a creditor of the company and therefore lost a substantial amount of capital when it eventually rolled over and sank, is not entirely convinced that the administration process was as effective as it should have been. "There were lots of things sold off, but none of the money generated ever seemed to materialise," he comments.

Regardless of whatever went on behind the scenes, Waldern succeeded in acquiring much of Virtuality's IP and technology to form a new company called Retinal Displays Inc (later renamed 'Digilens') in Silicon Valley, California. Unfortunately, this business also went belly up in 2002 and Waldern performed the same trick again, snapping up much of the inventory and valuable patents to establish



» Hollywood sci-fi horror *The Lawnmower Man* contributed greatly to the VR buzz





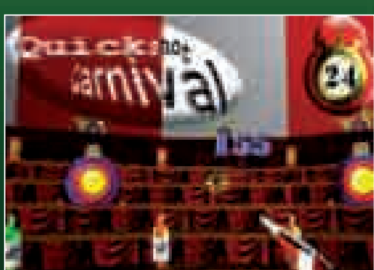
yet another venture – SBG Labs – with the aim of developing visual display equipment. In a rather cheeky nod to the past, at the time of writing the still-registered Virtuality URL (www.virtuality.com) redirects to the home page of SBG.

Although their working relationship with Waldern ended on a rather bum note, the talented duo still have kind words to say about their former employer. "I think Jon was a visionary with balls," states McIntyre. "To launch a company in your early 30s using unknown technology that attracted a great deal of scepticism and then float on the stock market was incredible. Personally, I'll always have a great deal of respect for the guy." Wilkinson agrees: "His confidence that he was right was so unwavering that you couldn't help but agree with him. I don't think I've ever met anyone who has the same quantity that Jon had."

Wilkinson now works in the US as senior director of technology at Activision and is reminded of his past work in the most unexpected of ways. "I went to give a presentation to the students at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh about six months ago. I walked into one of the labs and nearly fell over – two slightly cannibalised 'stand-up' Virtuality pods were in the corner. The CMU students were tasked with having to create fun experiences without a regular joypad or well-understood input device. They were struggling with the same problems we struggled with ten years ago." McIntyre has since returned to his native land of Scotland and is now involved in some very interesting developments at Glasgow-based 'Urban Learning Space' (www.urbanlearningspace.com) where he is employed as technical director. "Particularly relevant, and essentially the reason I joined, are the two pan-European VR projects we are involved with," he comments. "Both projects combine cutting-edge technologies such as real-time video streaming, marker-less tracking and immersive VR."

So what lessons did the duo glean from their tenure with Virtuality? "The big mistake that was made in the early days was trying to recreate existing console type games in a VR headset, and it just doesn't work," says Wilkinson, who also believes that current virtual reality technology presents a big obstacle: "The differences between everyone's inter-ocular distance and eyesight means that the headsets have to contain more technology than just two screens, and this makes headsets bulkier than is desired. Also, having LCD screens close to your eyes leads to headaches after about 20-30 minutes of sustained use." Hardly the kind of side effect that is going to inspire all-night videogaming marathons, then. "The other downside is that users have a ruddy great piece of plastic attached to their head," chuckles McIntyre. Bearing all of these points in mind, is there actually a future for VR videogaming? Wilkinson isn't entirely sure: "The current VR hardware doesn't lend itself to home use. It's too easy for other appliances to interfere with the tracking, there are cables everywhere and the small LCD monitors pale into insignificance compared to your huge flat-screen home theatre. Maybe in the future when you can pop on a pair of lightweight glasses and have interference-free head tracking it might resurface, but I doubt it will happen any time soon." Ultimately, he believes that until virtual reality is able to prove itself, it's unlikely to really catch on properly: "The real factor in whether VR will take off or not is all down to whether someone will discover that 'killer app' that truly shows what VR is all about. As we found at Virtuality, without a compelling reason to put a headset on in the first place, it just won't ever be successful."

"JON WAS A VISIONARY WITH BALLS. TO LAUNCH A COMPANY USING UNKNOWN TECHNOLOGY THAT ATTRACTED A LOT OF SCEPTICISM WAS INCREDIBLE" – DON MCINTYRE





» Virtuality units being inspected at the Leicester factory.

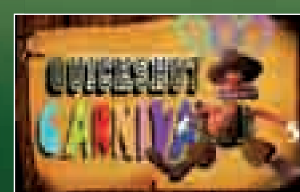


Developer Fact File

Years active: 1987-1997
Locations: Leicester, UK and California, USA
Hardware: 1000CS, SD1000, SU2000, SD2000, SU3000, Total Recoil, Atari Jaguar VR (Atari), 'Elysium' home system (unreleased)
Software: Dactyl Nightmare, Dactyl Nightmare 2: Race For The Eggs, Grid Busters, HERO, Legend Quest, VTOL, Virtuality Boxing, X-treme Strike, Quick Shot Carnival, Trap Master, Zone Hunter, Ghost Train, Buggy Ball, Pac-Man VR (unreleased), Missile Command 3D (Atari Jaguar)

VIRTUALITY





» Shooting games proved to be very popular.



» Sadly, you couldn't take the rifle home with you when the game had finished.

Humble thanks go to Matt Wilkinson and Don McIntyre for giving up their valuable time to take part in this feature and providing many of the images reproduced here.

BALLOON FIGHT

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM…



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+, 500 POINTS VIRTUAL CONSOLE

HISTORY



Anyone who thinks the name Nintendo has always stood for innovation and originality should quickly jump off their high horse and play *Balloon Fight*, because it's about as original as an episode of *EastEnders* is entertaining.

Nintendo may be currently wowing us with the likes of the DS and Wii, but it's all to easy to forget that it wasn't adverse to ripping off other company's ideas if the concept was good enough, and *Balloon Fight* is a perfect example.

To all intents and purposes, *Balloon Fight* was Nintendo's own take on Williams' *Joust*, but as usual, it's been given the 'Nintendo touch'.

Rather than playing a knight mounted on a flying ostrich, the main character was a young boy whose transport of choice was two balloons attached to his back. Realising that Williams had dibs on the flying ostrich, Nintendo opted for another bird that lacked the power of flight, the penguin. Fortunately, for Nintendo, while the in-game penguins lacked the evolutionary skills of their Williams cousins, they had mastered the ability of flight by attaching themselves to balloons (we actually saw this rare phenomena on the Discovery Channel once).

Once the penguins had blown their balloons up (again, we saw them doing this in the same documentary) the pesky birds would use their sharp beaks to pop your balloons and send you plummeting to your death (again, the same documentary). Fortunately, by gaining a higher altitude, you could climb above your feathered foe (do penguins actually have feathers?) and burst their own balloons, thus giving them a taste of their own medicine.

Yes it was a simple concept and yes it was just like *Joust*, but it's still a fun little game, and it's a game that's made even better by the nifty bonus entitled Balloon Trip that Nintendo kindly included. Once you got bored of battling penguins you could simply fly through a maze of devilishly placed spikes. Of course, once you got bored of that there's always the Discovery Channel…

Also, if you do think *EastEnders* is entertaining, what the hell are you doing reading Retro Gamer?





THE MAKING OF...

SUPERFROG



Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Is it a strange entity from outer space? No it's Superfrog: hero to fluffy animals everywhere, crusader for justice and lover of all things Lucozade. Kim Wild finds out from Martyn Brown and Allister Brimble what makes the green amphibian superhero tick



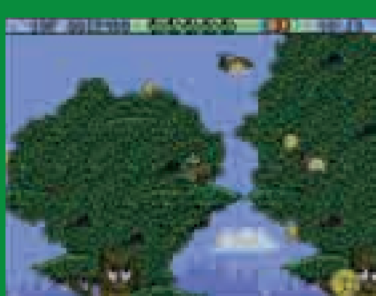


» This stunning intro sequence was created by Amiga animator Eric Schwartz.





In the late Eighties, 2D platformers ruled the roost. Mario was rescuing countless princesses on Nintendo consoles while Sonic was running rings around all opposition. Amiga fans had very few titles offering the same kind of antics until the arrival of *Zool* and *Superfrog* in 1992. Although *Zool* had its admirers, it's *Superfrog* that heralded the bigger following and still has a sizable fan base. Taking inspiration from both Mario and Sonic, Superfrog became a worthy hero in his own right and offered his fair share of original touches.



» He's up there… in the tree! He may not be Sonic or Mario but we wouldn't change him for the world.

"As ever, Rico came up with the character for this Frog, who was initially called Chuck, with a little green blob as a friend, called Spud," explains Martyn Brown. "I later suggested we call him Superfrog, who gained magical powers by drinking a bottle of Newcastle Brown Ale (my tipple at the time) – that stuck and hence Superfrog was born. In terms of content, it's fair to say that it was pretty organic in those days and the team (Andreas, Rico and myself) enjoyed a very close and at times. almost telepathic relationship. Andreas had coded a great level editor and Rico and myself would design/plan the game-flow, with Andreas doing most of the code (Stefan Boberg also pitching in) and Rico all art & concepts. Rico originally created Spud as another character and it was just a way of getting Spud in the game – he'd initially been outlined for his own game but that never happened for one reason or another."

With a character ready, he needed a game in which to perform the leading role. Eric Schwartz, known as an Amiga animator, brought *Superfrog*'s world to life with a fantastic introduction sequence that set the scene. "I'd been in touch with Eric from my 17-bit days (an Amiga club that concentrated on PD software, demos and so on) and thought it would be great to have some of his animations on the game. So he agreed, we did some concept animations, he did the animation and whilst it was way too big to use, Andreas re-used the art and re-coded the animation. It was created in Fantavision by Eric Schwartz and he came up with the storyboard after being told roughly what we wanted. Fantavision files were very large and there was no player we could use, so all the assets were used when Andreas re-coded the animation and compressed it onto one disc."

The story is a simple fairy tale. The Prince and Princess are happy together in the Enchanted Kingdom when an evil witch, struck with jealousy, abducts the Princess. Not content with stealing the Prince's true love, the witch turns the hapless hero into a frog to prevent him from trying to rescue her. However, she hadn't bargained on the arrival of a

"I STILL REMEMBER RICO'S FART SOUND FOR THE ENEMY'S SPLATTING AND THE LAUGHS WE HAD FROM IT" ALLISTER BRIMBLE

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** TEAM 17
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM GAME
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10

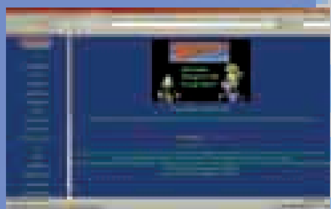
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WORMS: DIRECTOR'S CUT
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMIGA CD32, PC
YEAR: 1997

PROJECT X
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMIGA CD32, PC
YEAR: 1992

ALIEN BREED
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMIGA CD32, PC
YEAR: 1995

THE MAKING OF... SUPERFROG



» www.super-frog.co.uk is an exhaustive tribute to all things linked to our favourite frog.



» Even the aliens oozed cuteness but touch one at your peril.



» Superfrog would eventually be taken on a quest to the moon.

LUCOZADE: THE ENERGY DRINK

Many cartoon heroes have a secret to their strength: Popeye eats spinach to become strong to rescue Olive while Bananaman consumes bananas to save the world. With Superfrog it's Lucozade, where just one sip transforms our intrepid hero from a common human-turned-frog into a superhero equipped with magical powers. However the included beverage was entirely different to its origin. "It was supposed to be Newcastle Brown Ale and I wanted it to be voiced by Jimmy Nail (Oz in *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*) who would provide a thick Newcastle accent. However, his agent hadn't agreed and despite being offered Tim Healy (out of the same series) we ended up talking to SmithKline Beecham (makers of Lucozade) who were looking to get involved in games. They really liked it and Newcastle Brown was swapped for family-friendly Lucozade." At least he wouldn't be drunk on duty!



mysterious bottle containing a strange, sugary liquid (aka Lucozade). Once drunk, the elixir empowers the frog with magical powers, transforming him into the dynamic Superfrog. With his new abilities, Superfrog must travel across six treacherous worlds to reach the witch and bring back his beloved. Although a cliché, the portrayal of the story gives the character and the world within its personality and explains why Lucozade plays such a prominent role. The consumption of Lucozade added seconds to the clock and provided Superfrog with energy. While it does wonders for Superfrog, Lucozade doesn't appeal to Martyn Brown who subtly comments: "At the time there was only the bright orange, sugary stuff you have when you're ill – nowadays they do a lot of energy drinks, which are much better. I think that's as diplomatic as you can get!"

The cartoon introduction was a sign of how the rest of the game would spin out, with worlds full of cute, colourful enemies. Even the levels themselves were full of nice touches, with trees that have eyes, smiling faces within castle walls and water sprinklers used to reach higher platforms. Hidden areas and pipes, which Superfrog could use were a passing nod to Sonic, while the collection of coins to unlock level exits paid homage to Mario. Each world had a set theme, from the woodlands, a spooky castle, fairground, Egyptian settings, an ice world and finally, outer space. Despite its age, *Superfrog*'s approach still stands out as a feat of polished production values. Movement for Superfrog was incredibly smooth, floating onto platforms with the use of his red cape. Getting his movement right was something that took time. "It was a case of ensuring that the range of movements corresponded to the types of jumps and objects he would meet, as long as there were guidelines for this, the levels could be designed with that in mind."

> "I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY HE'S IN A NICE LITTLE RETIREMENT HOME NOW" MARTYN BROWN

Superfrog's fairy tale origins were enhanced by an excellent soundtrack by Allister Brimble, responsible for many of Team 17's scores. Many of *Superfrog*'s pieces came about from witnessing the animations for the game. "Team 17 had told me this was going to be a cute platformer. After I saw the *Superman*-style intro animation, this gave me a few ideas," explains Brimble. "I wanted somehow to mix the superhero style music found in the *Superman* movie with traditional cute game music. The addition of frog sounds added the humour." Sound effects reflected the feel of the game. "I first created a spring sound for the springs using a ruler. The splat sound when you land on an enemy was actually created by Rico Holmes who was being silly in the microphone making fart sounds! When we listened to them back they were absolutely perfect for the game!"

As a result, Brimble has many memories about working on the game. "The whole development team stayed at my house for a week at one point. I remember how hard Andreas used to work. I said goodnight to him at midnight and when I got up in the morning he was still hard at work! I still remember Rico's fart sound for the enemy's splatting and the laughs we had from it."

In order to create music, Brimble used the famous soundtracker on the Amiga. "The music was across all four channels with channel four

» Mr Ploppy, the lowest rank you can achieve as a high score. Can you become a Frog God?





» "We thought it would be fun to parody *Project-X* and at the same time have a nice break."



» At times the developers would tease you with fake exits like this one.


» Spikes are an ever-present feature in all worlds.

being low priority stuff which the SFX could overwrite when needed. You hardly notice it happening in the game. This was pretty unusual for the time." Interestingly, the limitations of the Amiga proved an advantage. "One would think that with all the technology available today that all game music would be better. However, I find this not to be the case. The restrictions of the Amiga's four sound channels forced you to think about the layout of the tracks which meant you spent a lot more time improving and tweaking the music. Today, you can do anything you want – no restrictions, and this can lead to overuse of instruments and effects. Sometimes less is more!" When quizzed regarding his favourite composition, Brimble responds "Definitely the haunted house track! I had wanted to do something like this for a long time, using techniques I had learned from Tim Follin's music – ie the sliding instruments echo across two channels.

While its cheerful exterior implies a simple game, later levels revealed *Superfrog* to be a challenging experience, at times a little too difficult and making the choice of seven lives in the options menu a godsend. Of course there were power-ups available to aid Superfrog, from pills to make him invisible, speed up and down or serve as restart points, wings for flying abilities and ultimately Spud, used to hurl at enemies. One of the memorable levels is secret area Project F, parodying their famous shooting title *Project X*.

There were plenty of fruit and gems to collect, which boosted the player's score. This would lead to the game's more inventive idea, where the credits earned at the end of the level based on the score could be gambled in a fruit machine mini-game. While your score could be increased, it was possible to win extra lives and even level codes. All these points determined your frog ranking once all lives were lost.

Although simple to play (the basic concept for each level was to collect the designated coins to unlock the exit and then locate it), at times the control system of pushing up to make Superfrog jump made it harder than it should have been. This was very much down to the technology at the time, with "the problem being that you had to fire Spud too – and could do so in several directions by holding down fire and pressing a direction. Since most joysticks just had one button, the decision was made to put firing on the button and use up to jump. We never had too many complaints about it though".

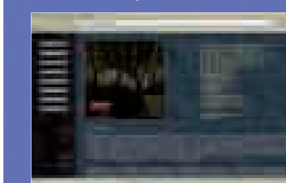
Yet while the game turned out to be a piece of great design, little of it was planned in detail. "It just happened. Many things back then happened", comments Brown on *Superfrog*'s creation. "We weren't hampered by process or considered design, we did what we felt was right. We'd redo some things, but most of the time it was pretty instinctive. Talking to other developers who worked around then, it was the same for them too – simply because the industry was so young and naïve that no one had the necessary experience or knowledge of design procedures to plan anything 'properly' it was very much 'seat of the pants'. For all of this, both Brimble and Brown are pleased with the final results. "Team 17 set out to produce a simple arcade platform game that played well", explains Brimble. "They certainly achieved this and I think the addition of the frog being able to fly added a new dimension." Brown agrees: "I think we were all pleased with *Superfrog* and it's always been well-loved by many fans. At the end of it though, I didn't want to touch the game for a long time, such was the effort and pressure on getting the game polished – it was very anti-climatic when it was finished."

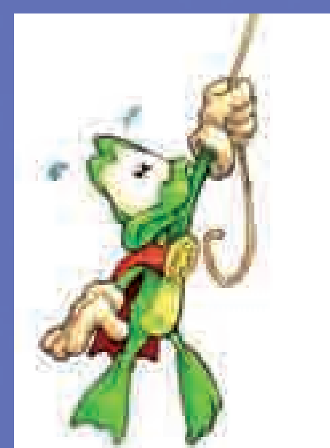
Despite cameo appearances in *Worms Blast* and *Worms 3D*, it's unlikely that the popular character will make a comeback. "Although I think he's a great character – he's now all in 3D" enthuses Martyn Brown. "We've not had a game idea really leap out to us. We did think about it – over the last few years too, but the chance never really came about. I think it's safe to say he's in a nice little retirement home now."



TEAM IMMORTAL

Although fans have created their own tracks at sites like www.remixed.org, they don't impress Brimble. "I have listened to a few of these remixes recently and have to say I was quite disappointed with most of them. Rather that start from scratch they seem to be just the original Amiga mods with something layered over the top, which doesn't make an improvement for me. A couple have been good though and those are all complete rewrites using new sounds. I hope soon to create some of my own remixes of Amiga tracks for the internet. I have already rewritten *Alien Breed* and *Project X*, which can be found on the Immortal range of Amiga CDs". These CDs, available from www.amiga-immortal.com priced at 14-22 Euros (£10-14), also feature music from artists such as Richard Joseph (*Robocod*).




» A piece of artwork which was drawn by Rico Holmes himself


» Superfrog discovers that flames are quite painful after all.

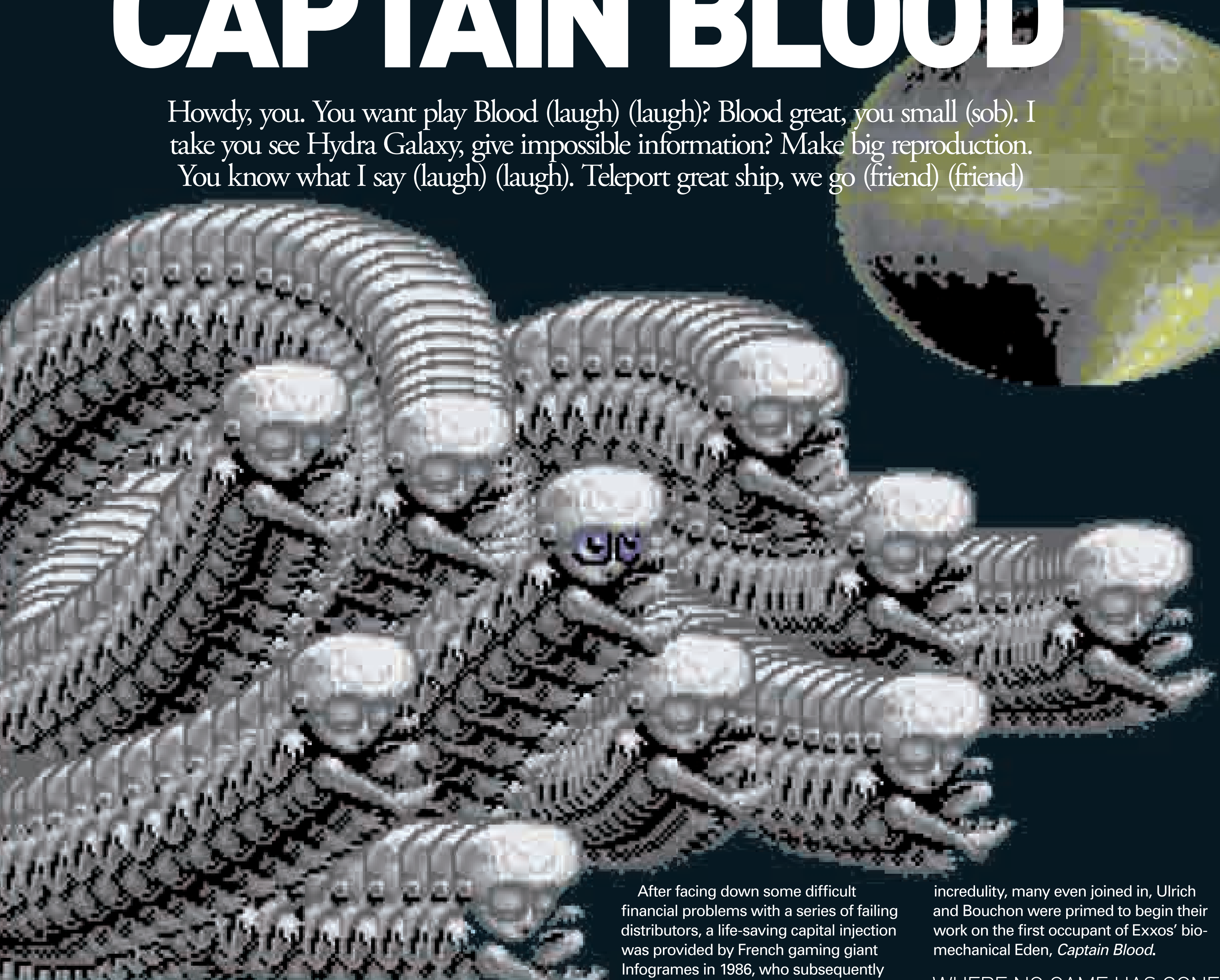

» The fruit machine mini-game was added to give players a break from all that jumping around.


» No time to rest Superfrog. Grab that lucozade and continue your mission.

THE CLASSIC GAME

CAPTAIN BLOOD

Howdy, you. You want play Blood (laugh) (laugh)? Blood great, you small (sob). I take you see Hydra Galaxy, give impossible information? Make big reproduction. You know what I say (laugh) (laugh). Teleport great ship, we go (friend) (friend)



Trust me – a few minutes at the UPCOM panel arguing about the co-ordinates of a planet where Small Yoko can get go to get his freak on and that disjointed introduction will make perfect sense. It's one of many such conversations you'll have in the surreal, grotesque and, at times, facetious universe of *Captain Blood*.

EXXOS: THE FRENCH GOD OF GAMES

An enigmatic and highly creative type, Philippe Ulrich's fascination with a computer's musical and entertainment possibilities prompted him to team up with Emmanuel Viau and found the first French games developer in 1981, ERE Informatique.

After facing down some difficult financial problems with a series of failing distributors, a life-saving capital injection was provided by French gaming giant Infogrames in 1986, who subsequently bought the entire company.

This allowed Ulrich the freedom to let his imagination run wild and begin working toward the hardcore sci-fi chronicles he was intent on creating. Bringing in Didier Bouchon – a likeminded artist who'd done some design work on his earlier games – the two put their minds to delivering a dark fantasy epic for the Atari ST.

At a fittingly surreal press conference, Ulrich not only announced the new experimental gaming label within the Infogrames sphere, Exxos, but also his new religion dedicated to the worship of a god by the same name! He stood before a host of journalists and newsmen, urging them to repeatedly chant the phrase: "Ata ata hoglo hulu!" in praise of this new gaming deity. After a few moments of incredulity, many even joined in, Ulrich and Bouchon were primed to begin their work on the first occupant of Exxos' bio-mechanical Eden, *Captain Blood*.

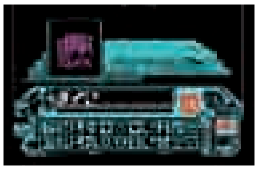
WHERE NO GAME HAS GONE BEFORE

The twisted, hallucinogenic and, it has to be said, often humorous story of *Captain Blood* is something of an illusory bastardisation of *Tron*, wherein a despondent computer programmer unwittingly becomes a malfunctioning



» The impressive (for the time) 3D flight sequence as an Oorxx bio-missile is piloted to the surface of a planet.

IN THE KNOW



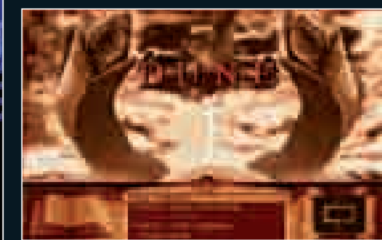
- » **PUBLISHER:** INFOGRAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** EXXOS
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** RPG
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



» As his condition worsens, Blood's hand spasms in response to his new technological nervous system; a wonderful, visual euphemism in lieu of a typical countdown as the time limit nears.

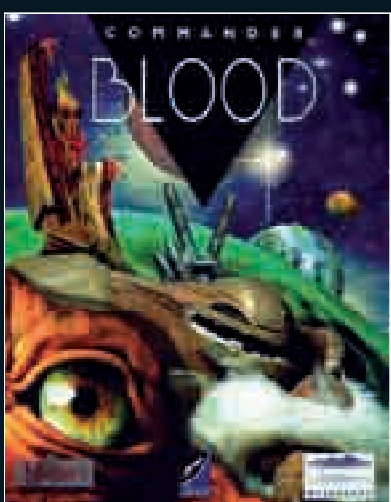


» A fantasy world like no other, and we have Exxos to thank.



» Exxos' development talent went on to form Cryo Interactive Entertainment and immediately wowed the industry the hit adaptation of the James Herbert novel, *Dune*.

EACH SPECIES HAS THEIR OWN MODE OF SPEECH, MEANING BLOOD MUST ENDURE THE SELF-EFFACING PESSIMISM OF THE IZWAL AND THE DIPLOMATIC BUREAUCRACY OF THE BUGGOL



» In 1994, an MS-DOS-only sequel was released called *Commander Blood*. Although it went mostly unnoticed, this is a serious overhaul to the original game and a valuable addition for ardent fans.

narration subroutine in the biological computer system of the real Captain Blood's space ship.

Blood has just begun a desperate quest to hunt down the last five 'Duplicates' (clones of the Captain) across the galaxy and recover his essential juices taken during the accidental cloning process. To keep him alive during the search, his ship (The Ark) gradually replaces his organs and functions with cybernetic devices. This adds to Blood's woes as he fights to regain his humanity before the lure of full, robotic replacement becomes too much.

The Ark is a massive living entity unable to physically land on any of the 32,768 planets in the vast Hydra Galaxy. To facilitate Blood's search, the Ark is able to give birth to Oorxx missiles. These living, biological machines have a number of uses, such as providing orbital reconnaissance of a planet's defence systems, teleportation of life forms and, most impressively of all, destruction of an entire planet.

Before an Oorxx can be put to effective use, however, Blood must manually fly the living missile over the planet's surface and through a tight canyon to the home of the inhabitant in an impressive 3D mini-game sequence. Once the Oorxx has located a life form it lands and makes itself available as a comms relay or weapon of mass destruction, depending on requirements.

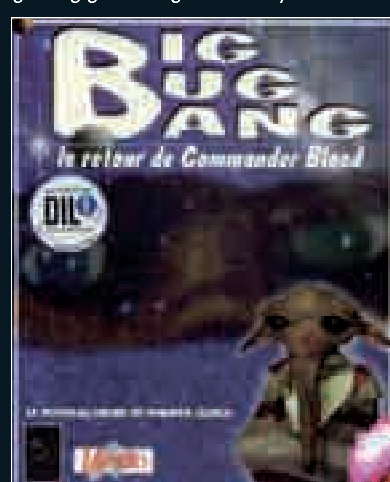
Since the galaxy is so mind-numbingly vast, jumping through hyperspace at random is a sure way for Blood to spend his last few hours of humanity in solitude. The game always begins at a populated planet, so coercing information from whichever creature the Oorxx locates is vital to the dreamlike quest. Keeping note of the locations of populated planets is a must for any space travellers, as is investigating any leads proffered by the weird and wonderful galactic inhabitants.

Interspecies interaction involves translating a series of UPCOM (Universal Protocol of Communication) symbols from a library of 150 different visual concepts, then replying in a similar manner. Each species also has their own mode of speech, meaning Blood must endure the self-effacing pessimism of the Izwal, the diplomatic bureaucracy of the Buggol and the underhanded belligerence of the Yukas.

Once a 'Number' (as the five clones are called) has been tracked down, Blood must dupe them into willingly transporting to his ship. When an alien is beamed on-board, they're stored in cryogenic suspension as a security measure and placed in the fridgitorium. This storage device has a built-in cremation facility, if Blood should feel so inclined the occupant of the fridgitorium can be instantly disintegrated. As well as providing an outlet for vengeance this is the method by which the stalwart Captain reclaims his fluids from the clones.

THE BIO GAME

Ulrich originally stated that Exxos was the beginnings of the 'bio-game', and while this imaginary genre may sound a little ambiguous, the term becomes eerily understandable after an hour's play as *Captain Blood* really did find a whole new gaming genre single-handedly.



» The second sequel was even more obscure and unheard of than *Commander Blood*. *Big Bug Bang* was an MS-DOS game that only saw a French release. So sad (sob) (sob).

MEET BOB MORLOK

The Exxos label, despite only releasing three games, became revered for the extra contents of the game box. In *Captain Blood*'s case, it was the original novella *The Ark According To Captain Blood*.

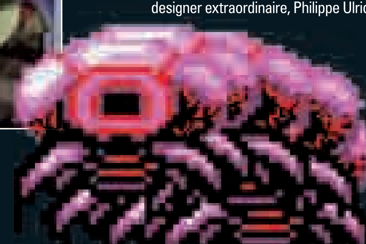
This eccentric and comical story explains the bizarre conception of Captain Blood and the otherworldly journey of his obsessed progenitor, Bob Morlok. Absorbed into the diseased universe he created for a videogame, Bob becomes an aspect of Captain Blood's bio-consciousness. When a failed hyperspace jump clones 30 copies of the Captain, the mission begins to reclaim them and restore the vital fluids used to make the 'Duplicates' to the original Blood.

Along the way, Blood encounters a female Oorxx and his ship dissects its genes to install an on-board birth ramp for controllable bio-missiles Blood can use to explore the galaxy more efficiently. After 800 years of searching, only five 'Numbers' remain, but they've been tipped off by a Migrax and hidden themselves away. This is where the novella ends and the player takes over Blood's nightmarish fate.





» Surrealist, sci-fi writer and game designer extraordinaire, Philippe Ulrich.



CONVERSION CAPERS

DRAGON'S LAIR

HOW THE HELL DO YOU CONVERT DRAGON'S LAIR TO HOME SYSTEMS? THAT QUESTION HAS CONFOUNDED A NUMBER OF DEVELOPERS SINCE THE LASERDISC ARCADE GAME EMBARRASSED COMPETING COIN-OPS BACK IN 1983. MARTYN CARROLL ROUNDS UP THOSE FOOLHARDY FEW WHO TRIED AND DISCOVERS THREE VERY DIFFERENT WAYS OF APPROACHING THE SAME IMPOSSIBLE TASK



For UK gamers the first chance to play *Dragon's Lair* outside of the arcade halls came courtesy of Software Projects in 1987. The Liverpool-based publisher, desperately seeking a hit after a couple of barren years, released *Dragon's Lair* on home computers.

Despite very average review scores, the game was a faithful port of the original. Obviously we're not drawing comparisons with the original laserdisc game – we'd be dafter than Dirk himself to suggest that our beloved 8-bits could recreate the arcade experience. We're talking instead about the little-known *Dragon's Lair* game released for the Coleco Adam in 1984. The Adam was a somewhat quirky computer designed to build on the success of the ColecoVision console. It didn't, however, and was discontinued in 1985, just two years after its launch. The Adam was sold predominately in the US, but some stock was shipped overseas and it was moderately successful in France. And it was in France where Software Projects boss Alan Maton picked up a copy of *Dragon's Lair* for the Adam while on holiday. He noticed the game in a computer shop, liked the look of it and bought it out of curiosity.

Back in Liverpool, Alan acquired an Adam and loaded up the game that Coleco had apparently paid $2 million to license. It was a curious multi-load affair with a number of varied levels loosely based on scenes from the arcade game. He acquired the rights from Coleco and set about creating a team to port the title. John Darnell handled the Commodore 64 version; Mike Davies and Colin Hogg worked on the Amstrad CPC version while Paul Hodgson and Andy Walker were drafted in at short notice to sort out the Spectrum version. Hodgson up the story: "The Dragon's Lair job was a contract which Andy and I took on after the demise of Andy's software house Taskset. The Spectrum conversion wasn't going well, and whether he walked or was pushed I don't recall, but the original programmer left very suddenly. We talked to Alan, who we'd known for some time, and got the contract to finish it off. Andy did the business and I did the software. Luckily I knew pretty much nothing about the original laserdisc game otherwise I'd have run a mile!"

Hodgson instead ran to The Golden Mile to get a feel for the game. "There were no arcades near where I lived which had it, so it meant a trip over to Blackpool", he begins. "I quickly found out that *Dragon's Lair* was no ordinary game. Quite how someone decided that it would convert nicely to the Spectrum escapes me." It wasn't all bad though. The game was more or less a direct port of an existing 8-bit title (written on another Z80-powered machine) and work on the conversion had already begun when Hodgson arrived. There was a problem however. "The original programmer left a heap of unfinished, undocumented source code. It was a real mess and page after page was just sheer guesswork. So we quickly took the decision to junk most of it and start from scratch. One useful thing,



» Creators of a legend. From left to right, animator Don Bluth and producers Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy.

which we did inherit, was the vast majority of the graphics. These had been done in-house by Nicole Baikaloff, a talented artist well used to squeezing the most out of the Spectrum."

Weeks progressed and deadlines loomed and finally with the code 'almost done', Hodgson and Walker decided to move over to Liverpool for a long weekend to finish it off. "Software Projects had rather dingy offices in a ramshackle part of the Bear Brand complex at Allerton Park," remembers Hodgson. "Heating and creature comforts were largely absent so we spent a cold bank holiday weekend working 24 hours a day. One of the receptionists took pity on us and brought a food parcel in, otherwise starvation was a real possibility."

As you've no doubt guessed by now, this wasn't exactly a magical time for Hodgson. "The *Dragon's Lair* conversion was a bit of a nightmare and not what I'd want to be remembered for", he admits to us. "I don't think it was an unqualified success because no matter what you do, you can't replicate a laserdisc game on a Spectrum. Through various technical limitations we did our best and I think it was pretty playable. Certainly for all its shortcomings a lot of people liked it. It did have some neat technical features – we multi-loaded the various levels with a bunch of central library routines staying resident and it was available on disk (yes, even on the Spectrum!) which didn't half improve things."

AMIGA FOREVER

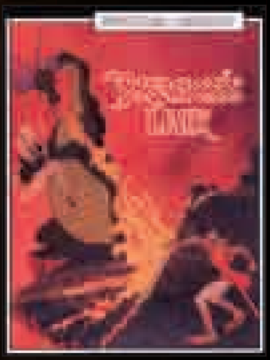
Faithfully replicating *Dragon's Lair* was always going to be an incredibly tough challenge that was entirely dependant on the available home hardware. In fact, it's only now with Digital Leisure's new HD release that we've been able to experience a truly authentic version in terms of gameplay, visuals and audio. So it's staggering to think that in 1988, ReadySoft (the precursor to Digital Leisure) began its long association with *Dragon's Lair* by creating a game that mimicked the laserdisc style on the Commodore Amiga. No one thought such a feat was possible, including Bluth Group, owners of *Dragon's Lair*. "I'm not sure they believed we could deliver a game that actually played like the original", says David Foster, who worked on the game with Randy Linden. "We proved people wrong by issuing a demo disk before the release and it spread quickly. Nobody could believe that the level of video quality was possible on the Amiga. Retailers at the time were playing the looping demo in-store to show what the Amiga was capable of. I suspect we sold a lot of hardware for Commodore."

So how did ReadySoft manage to display large, cartoon-style graphics on the Amiga? Foster explained that the key challenges were minimising the size of the data, maximising disk space and access times, and optimising processor usage. "We began by carefully selecting scenes without background movement, then spent a great deal of time separating the foreground elements from the backgrounds. We touched up the foregrounds, reduced the colour palette to 16 colours, then compared movement between the foreground of the current and subsequent frames and reduced any information that didn't change (not unlike how MPEG compression works). The foreground image was then compressed.

We didn't use the Amiga operating system at all. In fact on the Amiga 1000 we even reused the special memory where the system would normally load into. All disk access was handled directly and we determined how much data needed to be pre-buffered and continued to load from disk as the animation was playing. We also came up with a proprietary disk format that packed more

DIRK ON DISK

Dragon's Lair was a multi-loader so those with the cassette version had to play the tape after completing each level and rewind it back to the start when all their Dirks had expired. C64 and CPC owners had the choice of a disk version, which improved things a great deal, but the Speccy faithful had to make do with their trusty tapes – unless you were lucky enough to own an Opus disk drive that is. By returning your tape to Software Projects, along with an extra £4 (taking the total price to a hefty £14), you'd be sent a disk version that took some of the pain out of that overly familiar 'game over' screen. We have no idea how many people took Software Projects up on its offer, but we can bet that the Opus disk version is a nice little collectable these days.





» Based on the Coleco Adam original of two years earlier, *Dragon's Lair* was a huge hit for Software Projects.



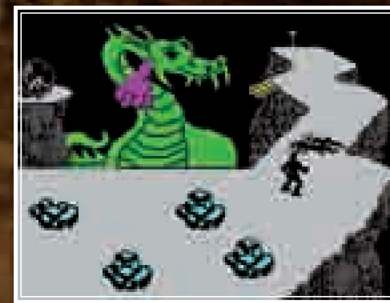
» While fairly primitive, the Coleco Adam version did at least attempt to mimic scenes from the coin-op.



"I QUICKLY FOUND OUT THAT DRAGON'S LAIR WAS NO ORDINARY GAME. QUITE HOW SOMEONE DECIDED THAT IT WOULD CONVERT NICELY TO THE SPECTRUM ESCAPES ME" PAUL HODGSON

CONVERSION CAPERS



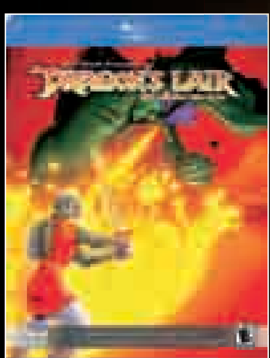


» According the Paul Hodgson, the final battle with Singe had to be rewritten at the last minute as it was impossible to complete as programmed.

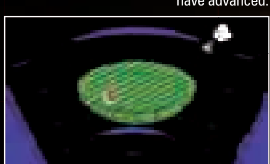
» **Left:** CD technology allowed ReadySoft to finally include the full compliment of arcade scenes. The video quality was a bit ropy however.

DRAGON'S LAIR IS RUBBISH. DISCUSS

Spare a thought for David Foster. His company Digital Leisure has spent the best part of 20 years trying to deliver the ultimate *Dragon's Lair* experience in the home. The new Blu-ray release is the closest yet, surpassing the earlier DVD versions, but reviewers always dwell on the same old subject: is *Dragon's Lair* actually any good? "We hear the same thing now that we heard almost 20 years ago about the gameplay", says Foster. "There are two camps of reviewers: those that accept that the gameplay is unchanged and that we've done a good job of recreating the original, and those that can't get over the fact that gameplay is the same and has not kept up with the current gaming styles. Certain versions over the years have included visual 'helpers' but in the versions I've been involved with it has always been about staying as true to the original as possible."



» The new Blu-ray release is as close to the original as possible. One of the extras on the disc is a side-by-side comparison of the HD and Amiga versions to show how far things have advanced.



» One neat feature of the C64 version was that it loaded the next level as you attempted the current challenge.

"NOBODY COULD BELIEVE THAT THE LEVEL OF VIDEO QUALITY WAS POSSIBLE ON THE AMIGA. RETAILERS WERE PLAYING A LOOPING DEMO TO SHOW WHAT THE AMIGA WAS CAPABLE OF. I SUSPECT WE SOLD A LOT OF HARDWARE FOR COMMODORE" DAVID FOSTER





» The memory test screens were tricky, with you having to hit the right command at the precise time to avoid instant death.

information onto each track. Finally, the code was very tight assembly language. The image decoding programming was optimised by the cycle times each instruction took. We were dealing with a 7.14MHz processor so every cycle had to count."

Of course some compromises had to be made, noticeably in the number of scenes that could be included. "We ended up with about 15 per cent of the arcade game in the release version and this was on six disks when disks cost $1.25 each. And clearly there were compromises in video quality and frame rate, but we were dealing with an underpowered system, at least relative to what we wanted to achieve, with limited memory and a slow, small external storage device. It was uncharted territory at the time. Fortunately today's video codecs and storage media handle all of the tough tasks that we had to code for the Amiga."

Happily for everyone involved, the compromises did not detract too much and the game was a huge success. Foster remembers that ReadySoft struggled to meet the initial demand: "We released it at the World of Commodore show in December 1988 in Toronto and we literally could not make them fast enough. I think we sold over 1,000 units at that show alone. Because of the proprietary disk format we could only copy the disks on certain drives. We were copying 24 hours a day and it took us three months to finally clear the backorders."

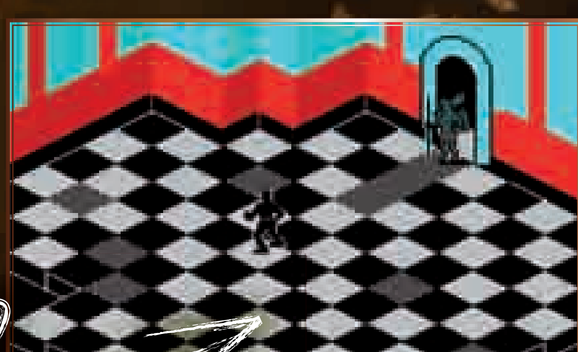
A semi-sequel quickly appeared, featuring additional scenes from the arcade version, and in 1990 the original Amiga version was ported to the PC, Mac and Atari ST. During the same year a very different *Dragon's Lair* game trundled onto the NES. It was developed by Birmingham-based Elite Systems, publisher of many a successful coin-op conversion including *Commando*, *Bomb Jack* and *Paperboy*.

ARE YOU ELITE?

Elite's involvement with the *Dragon's Lair* licence was mainly thanks to Software Projects. Following the slow death of Software Projects, Elite bought up some of its back catalogue, including *Dragon's Lair* and *Escape From Singe's Castle*, and re-released them on its Encore budget label. Both games were strong sellers and convinced Elite boss Steve Wilcox that he could possibly 'turn a penny' on a new console version.

Long-time Elite programmer Andy Williams (*Kokotoni Wilf*, *Frank Bruno's Boxing*) was enlisted to create the game – and he wasn't even thinking about following the ReadySoft route. "The NES was particularly suited to side-scrolling platform games so this is what we designed. The main feature of *Dragon's Lair* in the arcade was its superb graphics so we followed this and the game featured





» The awesome arcade battle with the dark knight was slightly less impressive on the Speccy.

» ReadySoft's Amiga version really was a revelation at the time, as this side by side comparison with the coin-op shows.





some of the largest and most detailed sprites seen on the NES. This did limit our gameplay design however. The animation had so many frames that it made the controls feel heavy, and it was far too hard."

Based on the success of *Dragon's Lair* (100,000 copies sold worldwide), Elite officially became one of Nintendo's first European third-party publishers. Over the next five or so years it released games for all the Nintendo platforms, so it was inevitable that a *Dragon's Lair* game would grace the SNES. Williams was once again involved, and this time he did at least consider a faithful conversion. "At Elite there had always been a push towards graphical quality, so we did investigate writing a scripting language that would allow us to create action similar to the laserdisc version but using hand-animated sprites. This was ultimately abandoned due to the huge amount of time required and the limited amount of memory available on the ROM carts. We decided instead to take the same approach as the NES version but use the SNES's more powerful graphics hardware to enhance the gameplay."

There were efforts to lift the game above standard SNES platforming fare. Williams explains that bespoke design tools were written to increase the size of the characters: "The SNES has a limit on both the number of sprites available and the number that can be displayed on a horizontal line. One of the artists working on the project, Steve Beverly, wrote an editor for the game that let us create larger characters. Before the editor allowed us to have the tall version of Dirk, we had what we referred to as 'Dumpy Dirk'! This little character used to bounce and slide around and moved much quicker than the character in the final game. Although we became quite attached to this little guy he was eventually removed in favour of the much larger Dirk."

Released in 1992, *Dragon's Lair* on the SNES matched the earlier NES version with impressive unit sales of around 100,000. History shows that regardless of the game itself, and how successfully it replicates the gameplay and cartoon visuals of the original, almost any title baring the *Dragon's Lair* name is a sales success. This is surely due to the initial impact and lasting appeal of the original arcade spectacular. "Videogames are visual media and any game that is as graphically stunning as *Dragon's Lair* is likely to be acclaimed", says Williams, one of Dirk's many fans. "Mix this with strong audio and distinctive characters and you truly have something very special. The original arcade game was criticised by some for its low level of interactivity. Did the other features make up for this? Its continued fame would certainly suggest that they did."

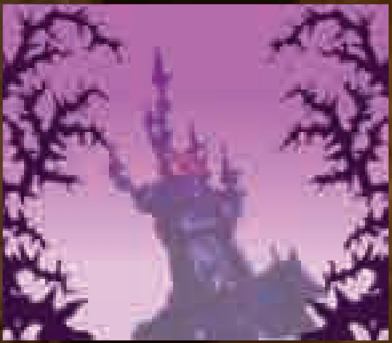
OH BOY!

Remember *Rollercoaster*, Elite System's colourful platformer released on the Spectrum in 1985? Elite itself certainly did when it came to releasing *Dragon's Lair: The Legend* for the original Game Boy in 1990. Rather than taking the obvious option and porting Dirk's NES outing to the handheld, Elite blew the cobwebs off *Rollercoaster* and dressed it up as a *Dragon's Lair* title. It featured a new plot involving Dirk and Daphne, but the levels themselves were robbed from *Rollercoaster*. Re-skinning the graphics didn't fool anyone – the level structure was almost identical, with the platforms and pick-ups even sharing the exact same pixel locations on screen (see screenshots below). The subtitle is fitting because this cheeky act of Speccy sabotage is already the stuff of legend.





» Talk about déjà vu! *Dragon's Lair: The Legend* was a clear rip-off of *Rollercoaster*.



» Although it was only loosely based on the original, the SNES version did at least recreate the arcade's attractive scenes.



» Unlike the NES version, exploring Singe's castle was not only enjoyable, but actually achievable by mere mortals.



» The password system in the SNES game was completely bizarre, with you having to painstakingly guide coloured balls into the correct holes. We've no idea why it was never the norm!

"THE MAIN FEATURE OF DRAGON'S LAIR WAS ITS SUPERB GRAPHICS SO WE FOLLOWED THIS AND THE GAME FEATURED SOME OF THE LARGEST AND MOST DETAILED SPRITES SEEN ON THE NES" ANDY WILLIAMS

CONVERSION CAPERS

THE DRAGON'S LAIR CONVERSIONS



The *Dragon's Lair* arcade game needs no introduction. It's one of those titles that just about every gamer alive is familiar with and has an opinion on. Regardless of whether you love the sheer spectacle of it or you loathe the scripted gameplay, there's no denying its widespread appeal and place in arcade history. And thanks to its amazing cartoon quality graphics, drawn by former Disney animator Don Bluth, it's one of the few Eighties games that still thrills on a visual level.

Before the introduction of DVD technology it was pretty much impossible to accurately recreate the original game. The film-like quality of the visuals and sheer number of scenes (including all of the must-see snippets of Dirk dying) was far too much for retro hardware to handle. But that didn't deter publishers from snapping up the rights to produce home versions. After all, there was more to *Dragon's Lair* that its cartoon presentation. The characters were memorable – blundering Dirk was a lovable hero – and Singe's creepy old castle was superbly realised. Above all, thanks to the impact of the original arcade title, *Dragon's Lair* was an extremely well-known name that had (and still has) real resonance with gamers. It's hardly surprising then that dozens of *Dragon's Lair* games have been released for computers and consoles since the coin-op debuted in 1983.

As we've shown over the previous pages, the home versions vary greatly in style and quality, from loose interpretations to close approximations to in-name-only adaptations of the arcade game. It's beyond the scope of this feature to consider every single tie-in, so rather than comparing the subtle differences between the Spectrum and Commodore 64 versions of the 8-bit *Dragon's Lair* game, for example, or judging the quality of video encoding between the Mega-CD and Jaguar versions, we've chosen instead to consider the different types of game to be licensed from the laserdisc original.

All of the games mentioned here can be played via emulation – a quick search of the web will reveal the game files and the software you need to run them. So if you're feeling daring why not load them up and make up your own mind? The rich legacy of *Dragon's Lair* is waiting to be discovered.

OTHER VERSIONS TO CONSIDER

ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE (C64, CPC, SPECTRUM)
ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE (AMIGA, ST, PC, MAC)
DRAGON'S LAIR (CD-I)
DRAGON'S LAIR (DVD-ROM, DVD-VIDEO)



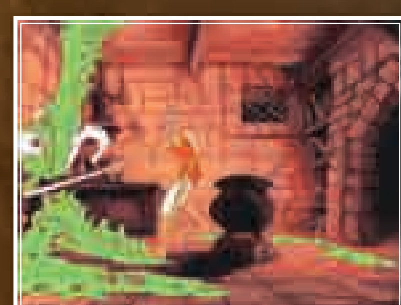
ADAM, C64, CPC, SPECTRUM



Coleco deserves praise for at least attempting to recreate memorable scenes from the coin-op on a machine with limited memory and basic display capabilities. Free from the scripted trappings of the original, it does make you wonder why Coleco didn't add more scope and playability to the mini-games. As it is, sections where the player has direct control over Dirk, such as 'falling disk' and 'burning ropes', are too clumsy, rigid and downright difficult to be enjoyable. Software Projects' main contribution was to make its version even harder (based on feedback by external play testers, apparently). Based on sound, graphics and control the C64 version comes out on top.



AMIGA, ST, PC, MAC



The Amiga version may look laughable compared to the later disc-based versions, but it has to be considered a greater achievement by far when you consider the relatively underpowered hardware it was running on. Seeing Dirk in all his full-screen glory on the Amiga was akin to glimpsing the original arcade game for the first time – it really was that much better looking than everything else out there. Only a handful of scenes were included, and unless you were lucky enough to own a supported hard drive you would be forever feeding your Amiga with floppy disks, but these drawbacks can't detract from what is a stunning technical achievement. A real showcase title.



NES

If you thought the Software Projects game was nightmarishly difficult then this NES version might just make your brain snap. It's not just hard, it's skull-splittingly hard. We'd love to tell you more about the game but after hours of prolonged play we barely made it inside Singe's castle, which is slightly worrying because you start the game standing outside the bloody front door! Dirk can jump, duck and throw daggers, but his preferred skill is collapsing into a pile of bones if anything vaguely threatening touches him. We've watched a video of the game played through to completion and it really isn't worth the hassle. A shame because the graphics are really quite special.





SNES

Dragon's Lair on the SNES plays like an apology for the earlier NES version, making amends for many of its problems. It adopts the same side-on platforming structure but the levels are more expansive, interactive and varied. And it's far more forgiving which was thoughtful of them. The game is firmly in the *Castlevania* mould, with Dirk exploring a large castle and whacking baddies with his sword and other weapons. The graphics are great throughout, and the game opens up nicely and you delve deeper into the castle, but it's always apparent that this is *Dragon's Lair* in name only. Remove Dirk and some familiar looking enemies and you could be playing any SNES platform-athon.





CD-ROM, MEGA-CD, 3DO, JAG

The main drawback of the 16-bit versions was that there was only so much data you could squeeze onto a floppy disk, and due to costs there were only so many floppy disks you could shovel inside a game box. The result was that many scenes were scaled down or sometimes removed altogether. However, with the advent of the CD-ROM, ReadySoft was finally able to deliver the full arcade version to PCs and consoles. Rather than recreating the original graphics it was now all about displaying full-motion video. As the technology was still in its infancy though, the quality of playback varies from system to system. The 3DO version is probably the best, while the Mega-CD version truly is a pixelated mess.



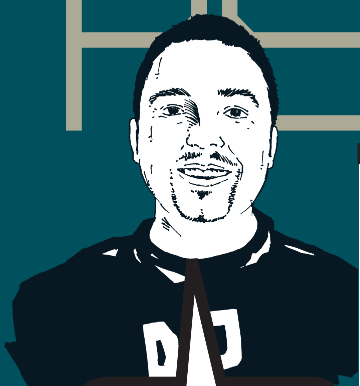


GAME BOY COLOR

Released back in 2001, this pocket-sized version definitely deserves a special mention because no one was expecting a faithful translation of the original coin-op on the GBC – a port of the SNES version seemed much more likely. Moreover, once it was announced, no one actually thought that Digital Eclipse would be able to pull it off – full-screen animation on the GBC seemed a step too far. But many were proved wrong and it worked a treat. Despite a few curtailed scenes and missing animations here and there, handheld fans really could have no complaints and it's a must-have for any fans of the series. It's perfect pick-up-and-play material, suiting the small format surprisingly well, and overall it's one *Dragon's Lair* game that no fan should be without.



RETRORATED



It has been a year since our last DS round-up and Nintendo's machine continues to go from strength to strength. It now supports an incredible range of titles, features prominently in all forms of media and continues to give Sony's PSP a jolly good spanking. Here's just a small selection of what's currently available.

YOSHI'S ISLAND DS

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** ARTOON
- **PRICE:** £29.99



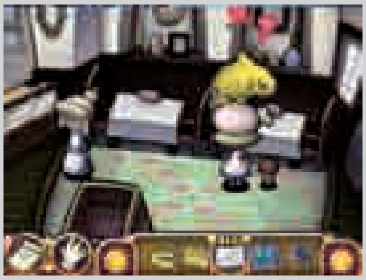
It's been out for a while now, but if you loved Yoshi's original SNES adventure, we definitely recommend that you hunt this brand-new DS sequel down. Despite not being made in-house, Artoon's follow-up is every bit as polished as the 16-bit original and features plenty of classic platforming moments, as well as a host of familiar characters. The pastel-tinted visuals are just as engaging as they were 12 years ago, while the addition of several new baby characters greatly expands on the original's gameplay mechanics. Travelling between the two screens can sometimes be rather irksome (particularly on the continuously scrolling levels), but if you're looking for a polished platformer you really can't go wrong.

OVERALL: **89%**

MYSTERY DETECTIVE

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** 505 GAMESTREET
- **DEVELOPER:** SUCCESS
- **PRICE::** £29.99



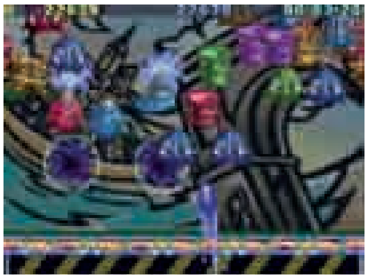
Who would have thought it? The point-and-click adventure is alive and well and living on the DS Lite. *Mystery Detective* will immediately appeal to anyone who's played an old LucasArts adventure, as they share many similar traits. While the script isn't as sharp, the obtuse puzzles, memorable characters and surreal encounters will instantly conjure up memories of *Sam & Max* or *Monkey Island*. There are certainly issues with *Mystery Detective* – some of the puzzles are a little too bizarre to solve and it's not the most accessible of games – but if you can overcome these small hurdles, you'll find an engaging little adventure that features some of the most distinctive visuals to ever appear on the DS's dual screens.

OVERALL: **70%**

MONSTER BOMBER

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** 505 GAMESTREET
- **DEVELOPER:** TAITO
- **PRICE:** £29.99



Now here's an interesting premise. Different coloured invaders are threatening to destroy the Earth and the only way you can stop them is by flinging paint of the same colour back at them with the stylus. Despite being a clever blend of both *Space Invaders* and *Bust-A-Move*, *Monster Bomber* doesn't really have the staying power of its older peers and you're likely to become bored before you come anywhere near completing its lengthy scenario mode. This in itself is a real pity as the stylus controls are actually superb, and turns throwing globs of paint into a fine art. Such a shame that the fun's so short lived, but keep your fingers crossed for a better sequel.

OVERALL: **46%**



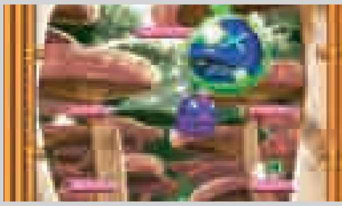
THEME PARK DS

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £29.99

While purists will no doubt moan that a few mechanics have been dropped from this DS outing, there can be no denying that *Theme Park DS* works incredibly well on Nintendo's handheld. Using the stylus is an utter joy and before long you'll be making dangerous rollercoasters, overfilling the drinks with too much ice and haemorrhaging large amounts of money like a seasoned pro. While it could be argued that EA hasn't really added anything new to the classic gameplay, many will no doubt say that there was no reason to change anything in the first place.

OVERALL: **83%**



BUBBLE BOBBLE: DOUBLE SHOT

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** RISING STAR
- **DEVELOPER:** MARVELOUS
- **PRICE::** £29.99

Considering how average the last *Bubble Bobble* game was on the DS we'll admit to not exactly looking forward to this sequel. But wait, it would appear that we should have been paying more attention, as this new caper is actually pretty good fun. Taking place over both screens and enabling you to switch between three different dinos, *Double Shot* is actually a solid addition to the franchise, and while it lacks the scoring intricacy and insane playability of its elder peer, it at least manages to make amends for the insipidly poor *Bubble Bobble Revolution*.

OVERALL: **76%**

DIDDY KONG RACING DS

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **PRICE:** £29.99

Granted many of the touch-screen controls feel tacked on, but as a pure racing experience, *Diddy Kong Racing DS* is an title that's second only to *Mario Kart DS*. While not quite as accessible as its elder peer, Rare has been hard at work to ensure that its classic N64 racer fits perfectly into today's handheld market and the results are of a very high standard. There's a wealth of new ideas on offer, the online racing is virtually flawless and all the classic tracks from the original game are present and correct. The DS's pin-sharp screen also means that the racing exploits of Diddy now look better than ever, so there's never been a better time to experience Rare's classic 64-bit hit.



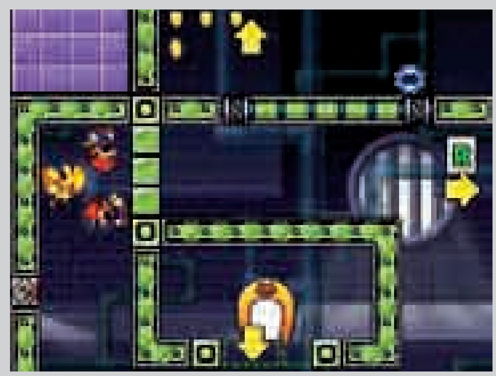
OVERALL: 81%

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG 2

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £29.99

Whereas *MVDK* was an all-out platformer that was based on the Game Boy's *Donkey Kong '94*, this sequel owes more to Psygnosis' *Lemmings* than Nintendo's 1994 original. Played entirely with the stylus, your aim is to guide a number of toy Marios to the exit, while avoiding as many hazards and enemies as possible. Although the early levels are extremely easy, later stages soon get increasingly tough and require fast manipulation of the DS's touch screen and the ability to think fast on your feet. Beautifully presented and instantly accessible for gamers of any level, *Mario Vs. Donkey Kong 2* proves that Nintendo really isn't afraid to take a licence in a bold and exciting new direction.



OVERALL: 81%

COOKING MAMA

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** 505 GAMESTREET
- **DEVELOPER:** MAJESCO
- **PRICE:** £29.99

***Cooking Mama* may be about as retro as a square is round but it has such a simple, engaging concept (the core of many retro games) that we felt inclined to include it.** As its name suggests, *Cooking Mama* is all about cooking. Using the DS's stylus and mic you can cut steak, chop onions, fry potatoes and engage in a whole variety of kitchen chores. It sounds incredibly dull and about as fun as impaling yourself on a set of super-sharp carving knives, but somehow it actually works. Granted, it's not going to be for everyone, but if you fancy something that's quite a way off the beaten path, may we suggest giving *Mama* a call.



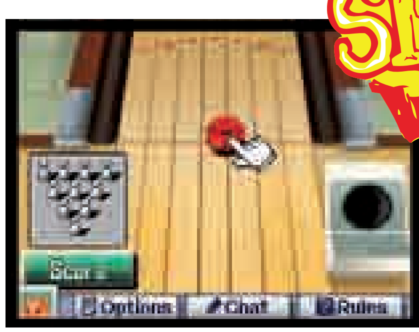
OVERALL: 72%

42 ALL-TIME CLASSICS

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** AGENDA
- **PRICE:** £19.99

If you enjoyed our write-up on Hanafuda cards in issue 31, but couldn't be bothered to shell out for an actual pack, then why not give this a whirl? Featuring the Koi-Koi variant of Hanafuda and 41 other parlour games, *42 All-Time Classics* is like delving into one of those huge 50-in-1 board compilations you could buy without worrying about all the tidying up afterwards. While many of the titles are unlikely to warrant more than a few plays, the likes of Koi-Koi, Chess, Turncoat, Backgammon and Bowling more than make up for them. Add a solid online mode, a great Pictochat feature and an enticing £20 price-tag and it all adds up to yet another essential DS purchase.





OVERALL: 90%

RETRORATED

HARVEST MOON DS

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NATSUME
- **PRICE:** £29.99



Delayed so Nintendo could iron out the many bugs that featured in the US and Japan releases, this latest iteration of everyone's favourite farming simulator proves to be a surprising amount of fun. Sadly, it's also starting to show its age, and after the superb *Magical Melody* for Nintendo's GameCube, this newest offering shows just how stale the once impeccable franchise has started to become. There's still plenty to enjoy here and there are some pleasant uses of the touch screen, but essentially, this is just a jazzed up version of the GBA's *Friends Of The Mineral Town*. Definitely worth a punt if you're new to the series, but seasoned veterans will rightly be expecting much more.

OVERALL: **70%**

HOTEL DUSK: ROOM 215

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** CING
- **PRICE:** £29.99



Yet another point-and-clicker, but this time it plays more like an interactive novel (for starters you hold the DS on its side). Telling the tale of the mysterious Kyle Hyde, *Hotel Dusk* is a well-told adventure featuring engaging characters, a surprisingly mature storyline and some very clever (if often easy to complete) puzzles. Despite being initially slow burning, the pace soon picks up and will have you completely hooked as the plot continually twists and turns. Add in some beautiful looking visuals (think a noir version of A-ha's *Take On Me* video) and plenty of cinematic flourishes and *Hotel Dusk* proves that Nintendo's handheld is often capable of delivering experiences that just aren't possible on other machines.

OVERALL: **84%**

ACTIONLOOP

retro GAMER SIZZLER

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** MITCHELL CORPORATION
- **PRICE:** £29.99



There's a huge array of different puzzle games available on the DS, but few can claim to be as compelling an experience as *Actionloop*. While it's already available on a variety of platforms, from Xbox Live Arcade to mobile phone, none of them play as well as this DS version. Indeed, it's almost as if the machine was conceived just to play Mitchell Corporations superb title, so flawless are its controls and design. Despite the simplistic gameplay – you have to stop a slowly moving line of different coloured balls by flinging balls of the same colour at them – *Actionloop* is more addictive than Crunchy Nut Cornflakes and effortlessly snatches the puzzle crown away from the likes of *Tetris* and *Zoo Keeper*. A must-have for any puzzler fan.

OVERALL: **91%**

BOMBERMAN LAND TOUCH!

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** RISING STAR GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON SOFT
- **PRICE:** £29.99



The Bomberman games have nearly always suffered from offering poor single-player experiences, so we were quite surprised to find out that *Bomberman Land*'s is reasonably enjoyable. While the main game consists of nothing more than a variety of mini-games, its clever structure means that you'll constantly want to continue playing in order to unlock everything the game has to offer. What elevates *Bomberman Land Touch!* to must-own status however is that it's the first DS version to allow you to play against players from all over the world, and the end result is one of the greatest multiplayer titles that's currently available on the machine. Yes you'll get the odd bit of lag, but when it's working properly, *Bomberman Land Touch!* is simply unbeatable.

OVERALL: **85%**

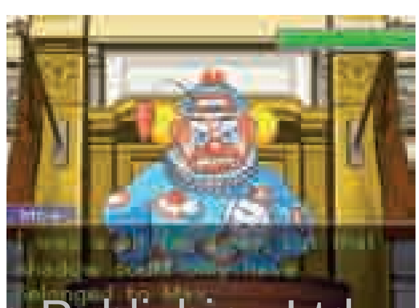
PHOENIX WRIGHT 2

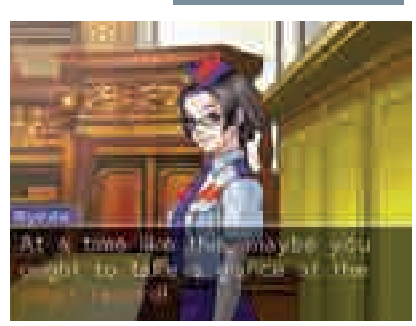
INFORMATION

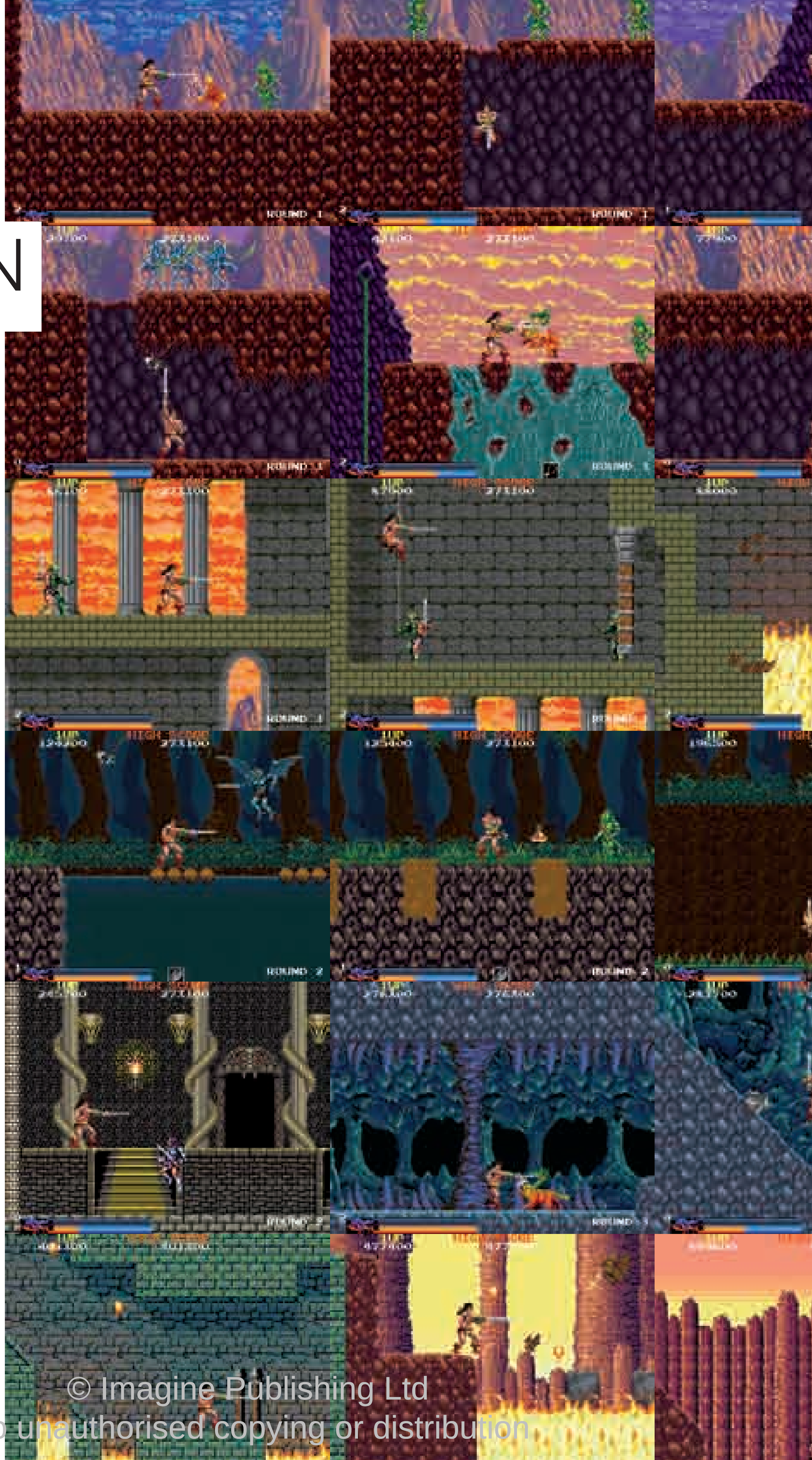
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PRICE:** £29.99

Like *Mystery Detective*, this second *Phoenix Wright* adventure – which, like the other games in the series began life on the GBA – is yet another homage to the point-and-click adventures of yesteryear. Fortunately, unlike 505 GameStreet's offering, *Phoenix Wright* manages to be a far more enjoyable experience, with a healthy blend of well-designed cases and off-the-wall humour that will keep you playing until its eventual conclusion. The exploits of an amateur defence attorney may not sound like the ideal basis for a game, but Capcom's sequel proves that you can not only have your cake and eat it, but can nick your friends when they're not looking and scoff that down as well.

OVERALL: **79%**







RASTAN

BUT YOU JUST HIT THINGS...



- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE/ACTION
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10 TAITO LEGENDS



HISTORY

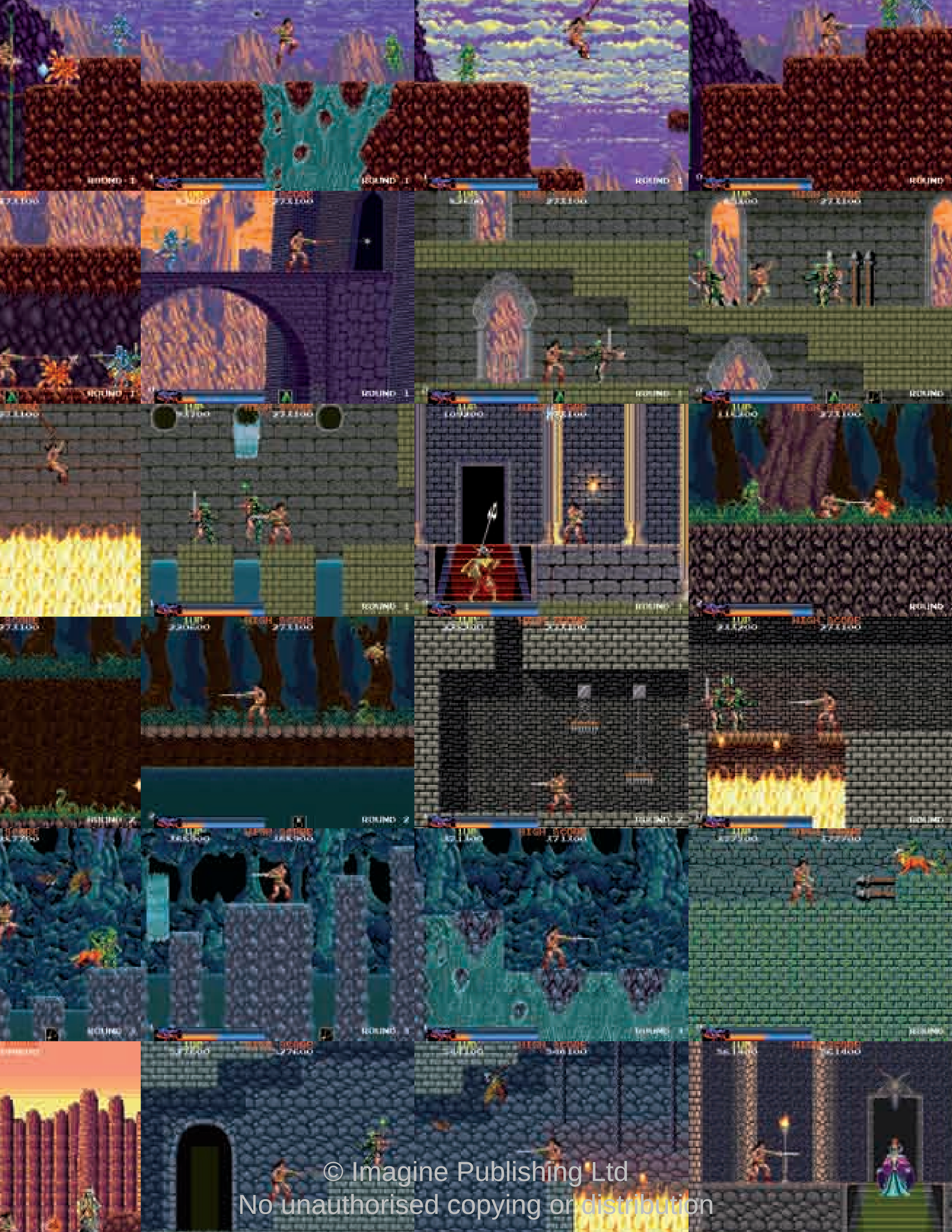
So there I am sitting at my desk, hunched over my keyboard playing Taito's *Rastan* and enjoying myself immensely. Yes, it's not the greatest scrolling fighter ever made, but it's got a nifty Conan vibe to it, the music is pretty funky and the pixel perfect jumps stay just the right side of irritating.

So anyway, I'm happily playing away, taking the odd screenshot here and there, and occasionally there and here, when a fellow journalist from one of our single format magazines comes over, takes one look at my screen and declares, "What's that piece of shit you're playing?"

Slowly counting to ten and resisting the urge to throttle the precocious youngster, I tell him the name of the game and that I used to really enjoy it down my local chip shop. "But what do you do in it?", he inquires. "Where's the variety? Where's the storyline? Where's the incentive to continue playing?" I began to explain that games didn't necessarily need to have storylines or amazing visuals in order to capture a gamer's imagination, but he's not having any of it.

"It looks dull and boring, I'd rather play *Devil May Cry 3*", and with that statement he slouches off, leaving me to wonder how so many gamers nowadays simply can't take something on face value and enjoy it for being fun, rather than because it's technically pushing boundaries or has the sort of visuals that would make *Gears Of War* weep.

I like jumping over flaming pits, hitting bats with flaming swords and facing off against the sorts of bosses that take five to six credits to kill. Granted *Rastan* isn't going to be winning any awards for sterling gameplay or gripping playability, but it has managed to weather the last 20 years and bring me no end of satisfaction. Would it be possible that a game like *Devil May Cry 3* will be doing the same in 2027?



BARGAIN HUNT

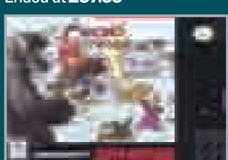
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

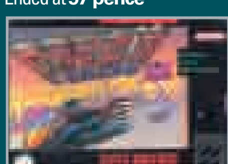
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

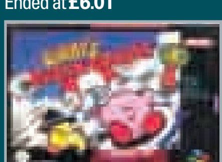
CHRONO TRIGGER
Normally sells for **£50+**
Ended at **£37.33**



F-ZERO
Normally sells for **£5+**
Ended at **57 pence**



KIRBY'S DREAM COURSE
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£6.01**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**

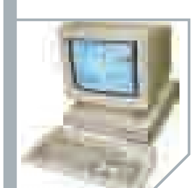


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

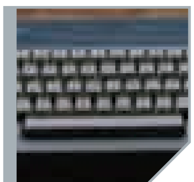
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).

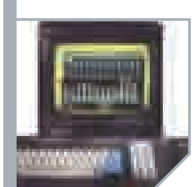


BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

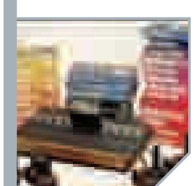


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



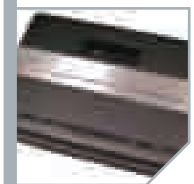
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

ROCKING HORSE SHIT
HEN'S TEETH
LUCKY FIND
EBAY REGULAR
CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



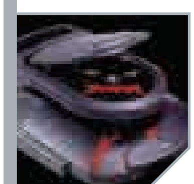
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

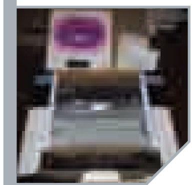


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

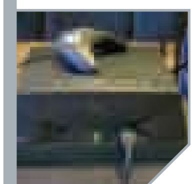
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



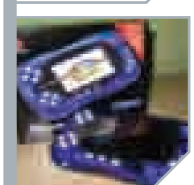
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best-selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

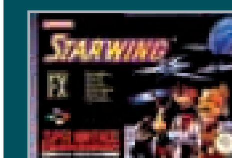


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

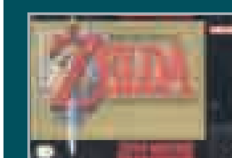
SUPER MARIO KART
Normally sells for **£18**
Ended at **£27.49**



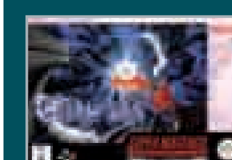
STARWING
Normally sells for **£3+**
Ended at **No sale**



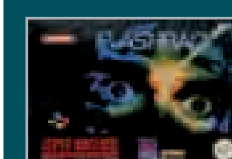
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£9.25**



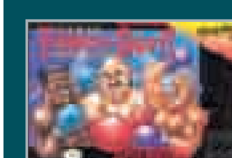
TERRANIGMA
Normally sells for **£30+**
Ended at **£48.81**



FLASHBACK
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£11.60**



SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!
Normally sells for **£15+**
Ended at **£23.51**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



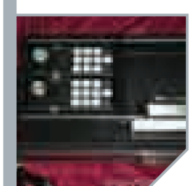
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
– Planet Earth - Blu Ray
– Clerks II - HD DVD
– Monster House Blu Ray



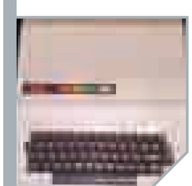
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More inanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



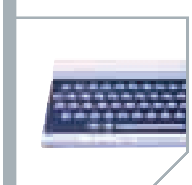
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
Another attempt by Sony to enter the game hardware market (after the MSX), this time the company took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



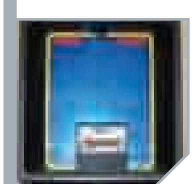
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



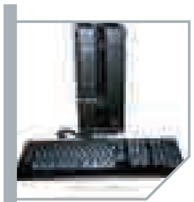
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

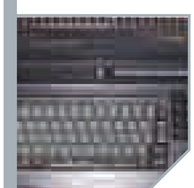
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

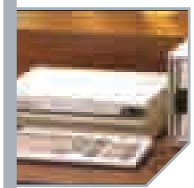
NEC



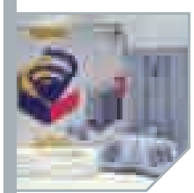
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



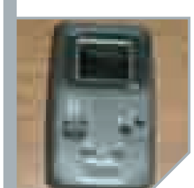
PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



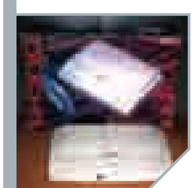
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!



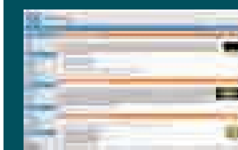
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



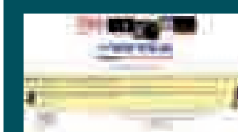
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES

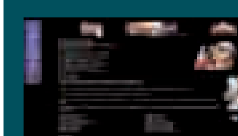
ATARI AGE
There are plenty of dedicated Atari sites around on the internet, but few come close to the staggering amount of detail that's contained at the wonderful Atari Age. All systems are covered, videogames are listed by rarity and plenty of interesting reviews are available. A great site for Atari fans.
www.atariage.com



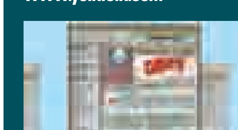
THE RUBBER BEERMAT
Any Spectrum site brave enough to have a top 100 that doesn't feature *Jet Set Willy* or *Manic Miner* is always going to be worth a look in our books. There aren't that many reviews up at the moment, but it's a website you should definitely keep an eye on.
www.therubberbeermat.co.uk

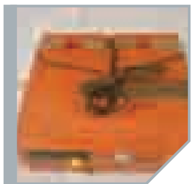


NEO-GEO.COM
Ignore the naysayers who will tell you that Neo-Geo.com is full of elitist owners – they're probably just jealous… What you get is a group of extremely knowledgeable forum members, plenty of useful reviews, a handy price guide and masses of screenshots to drool over. A wonderful site.
www.neo-geo.com

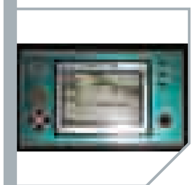


YOLK FOLK.COM
Features all sorts of information about Dizzy, the Oliver Twins' most famous creation. Every game in the franchise is documented; there are interviews with the twins and even homebrew games to download. Check it out at
www.yolkfolk.com

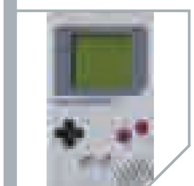




SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



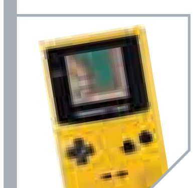
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



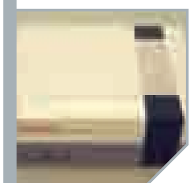
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



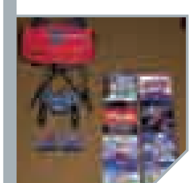
NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



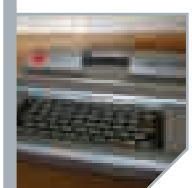
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



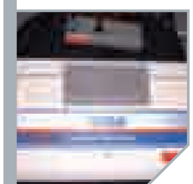
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection.

Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

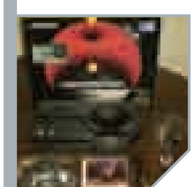


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/Xeye
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

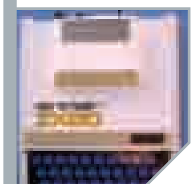
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR

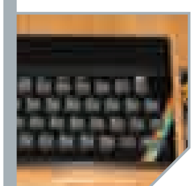


ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



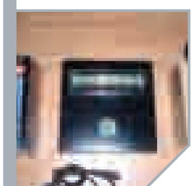
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- WAKU WAKU 7

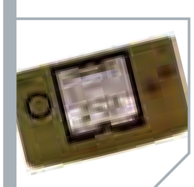


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

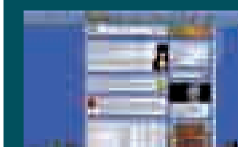


NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

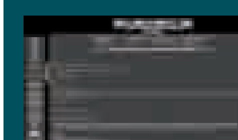
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS [CAPCOM/SNK]
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM [CAP VS SNK]

RETRO GAMING SITES

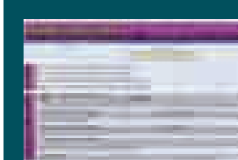
LEMON AMIGA
We're huge fans of Commodore's 16-bit Amiga, so it's great knowing that dedicated sites like Lemon Amiga exist for it. Like sister site Lemon64, this is an amazingly comprehensive website that features thousands of screenshots, a friendly forum and a great chat-room. If you have got an Amiga, you've found home.
www.lemonamiga.com



SYSTEM 16
Everything you could possibly want to know about the arcade industry is lovingly documented at this informative little site. Practically every arcade game ever made is listed here, and there are plenty of detailed screenshots of both the games and their PCB boards. Great stuff.
www.system16.com



THE DRAGON'S LAIR PROJECT
To tie in with this month's Conversion Capers, we thought you might want to check out this rather comprehensive website. Every aspect of *Dragon's Lair* and its sequel are covered, and there's all other laser disk videogames featured as well.
www.dragons-lair-project.com



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

LOAD 39

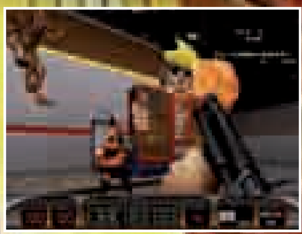
NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 21 JUNE 2007

COME GET SOME!

THE MAKING OF… DUKE NUKEM 3D

DISCOVER HOW THE DUKE MADE THE SUCCESSFUL LEAP FROM PLATFORMING HERO TO FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER SUPERSTAR





RETROINSPECTION…

Amiga 500 – It's one of the world's most beloved 16-bit systems, but what made it tick? Retro Gamer investigates…

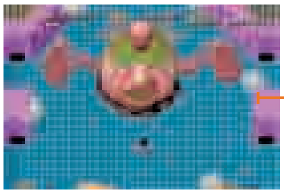
OTHER EXCITING FEATURES…

- We continue our look at SNK with the second instalment of our three-part feature
- Jon Hare looks back at the creation of his Commodore 64 hit *Parallax*
- Sega reveals the creative process behind its insane arcade racer, *Crazy Taxi*
- The creators of *Lemmings* talk about devious puzzle design, green hair and suicidal rodents

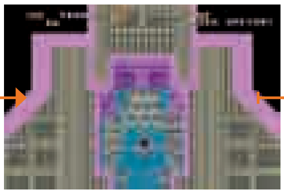
END/GAME



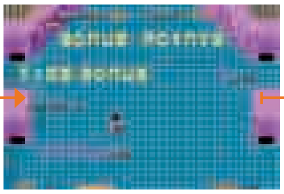
With a brand new Alien Syndrome game on the way from Sega for the Wii and PSP we thought it was high time we looked back at where the series began. Or rather ended…



SCREEN 1
Talk about saving the best 'till last. After fighting your way through the sort of hideous freaks that only an alien mother could love, Sega trumped the lot with this disgusting monstrosity. Eeeew.



SCREEN 2
It may look absolutely disgusting but as Arnie once said: "If it bleeds, we can kill it". Suffice to say, several plasma bullets to the face and the big bad boss runs crying to his mummy.



SCREEN 3
It's been a long hard slog but you've finally rescued all the captured humans. Now all you have to do is sit back and wait 21 years for Sega to make a 'proper' sequel.



SCREEN 4
Awww isn't that nice. After battling the vicious alien forces our hero is finally able to relax with his gal leaving us to laugh at Sega's spelling of catastrophe. Engrish at its very best.



SCREEN 5
The credits have all rolled, you're ready to move on and play another game and yet they're still snogging like a pair of lovesick teenagers. Get a room already, there's kids watching.